THE SCHOOL IMPROVEMENT AND TRANSFORMATION SYSTEM

Donna L. Ferrara

ABSTRACT

The School Improvement and Transformation System© was designed to address the major flaws in most reform and improvement initiatives in schools. The System is a multiple-target planning model, which facilitates school improvement by systemically and systematically transforming schools into professional learning communities by integrating the major components associated with successful school reform and improvement.

The System is grounded in the theoretical and empirical literature of leadership and educational reform and improvement. Micro, macro, and combination micro-macro components associated with school leadership, the science of teaching, and student success provide both the structure and the contents of the System. Specifically the System targets four clusters: leadership perspective, cultural aspects of the school, the technology of teaching and learning, and the technology of research and planning.

The System provides entry into both school leadership and the technology of teaching. The article provides not only a description of the System but also specific guidelines on the use of the System. Step-by-step guidelines and descriptions include how to scan the school to initiate the model and how to put the system into practice in a four-stage progression (introduction of the model, planning for improvement and transformation, implementation of planning targets, and institutionalizing the innovations).

A detailed example of how to implement the System is described in the article. How the System contributes to cultural transformation and the development of a professional learning community is addressed. Some comments are offered on implications for planning and practice; such comments address many planning and practice issues that can impact the successful implementation of the model if issues are not addressed during the planning and implementation of the improvement changes.

A Multiple-Target Planning Model to Facilitate School Improvement

When reformers set out to improve schools, they often face many challenges, some of them unforeseen. One challenge that presents itself early is the scope that reforms should take: Should the reforms be "sweeping," or should practitioners target specific improvements?

Often, in the name of expediency, educators elect to apply discrete solutions, believing that the sum of the "discrete" solutions will not only improve the school but correct systemic problems as well. Sometimes, the solution is perceived to be a simple importing of a specific program or approach. What educators often fail to consider is that improving a school is far more complex than simply addressing one or several individual problems.

Deficiencies in school functioning or in student learning or performance are seldom merely the result of a single weakness in the organization of the school or in poor instructional programming in a particular area of learning. Rather, deficiencies in school or student performance or in school and student outcomes often serve as indicators of systemic weakness--horizontally, vertically, and interactively--in leadership, in characteristics of the culture, in programming, in the choices of instructional methods and approaches across the learning environment, and in decision making at all levels of the school and the instructional program.

There are many reasons for educators to approach complex problems with simplistic solutions: lack of time, lack of resources, a lack or knowledge regarding school dynamics, undeveloped competencies to deal with the complexity of the dynamics in schools, among other things. But perhaps more than anything, what is absent in schools today is a knowledge base for school leaders that will lead to the practice of forms of leadership that shape school culture (Deal & Peterson, 1999), facilitate dealing with complex school issues, and link leadership capacity and leadership competencies with school reform.

What has complicated the issue for educators is that the field until recently has lacked (a) substantive research illuminating the role and technical work of leadership in sweeping school reform and (b)

guidance regarding how to integrate multiple cultural, planning, professional, and technical factors that are critical to the success of reform and school improvement efforts.

This article addresses the dilemmas presented above by presenting a model designed to incorporate and integrate research-based components associated with effective and successful school reform practices. The article begins with a short discussion of recent work in the field of leadership, which will serve as a foundation to the model presented.

THE CONTRIBUTION OF LEADERSHIP TO SCHOOL IMPROVEMENT AND TRANSFORMATION

Leadership has been propelled to the forefront once again in conversations about school improvement. Leadership is regarded as critical to current reform agendas. Principal leadership, in particular, is of great interest and concern inasmuch as principal leadership is critical in developing and sustaining school-level conditions that are essential for instructional improvement (Hallinger & Heck, 1996).

A survey of more recent leadership research reveals that the research community is responding to the call from scholars to refocus scholarship in the field of educational administration. Consequently, a new body of research is investigating more discrete aspects in the field of educational administration and leadership (Spillane, 2004). Researchers are now identifying and addressing such topics as (a) leadership for instructional improvement from a distributed perspective, (b) systemic leadership, which takes into account how leadership is distributed both vertically and horizontally, (c) the contents of what leaders need to know about the teaching and learning of specific school subjects in order to enhance their practice as instructional leaders, (d) the mechanisms by which leadership changes and transitions during change and reform initiatives (Spillane, 2004), and (e) how local school leaders construct conditions for professional community in their schools.

Recent findings from the leadership literature suggested that reform efforts must apply systemic and systematic approaches; integrate multiple components within the school; link and integrate critical functions; promote a climate and culture for learning; build capacity, systems of practice, and professional community; provide opportunities for distributing leadership; and, accommodate, guide, and refine the indirect and direct influence that both administrators and teachers contribute to school improvement.

WHAT DOES WORK IN EDUCATIONAL REFORM AND IMPROVEMENT?

Specific programs do not address the multi-layered needs in schools nor systemic weakness. Difficulties in successfully attending to school reform emanate from the failure to utilize an ongoing, holistic, interactive, and recursive process that will incorporate dynamic elements in a school. Employing such a process is critical as the historically loosely coupled nature of schools makes it difficult to establish in a linear manner how elements do or do not interface (Weick, 1979).

While educators must address both micro and macro issues in the school setting, they often fail to enter interventions through a macro *system* before proceeding to address specific weaknesses in the school setting or in the instructional program. They also fail to employ strategies that can *transform* the system. In effect, current educators must now discover meaningful ways of *coupling* the many components and functions across the school learning environment that will promote continuous learning, growth, and improvement.

The work is conducted blindly if the system as a whole is not first addressed. The blueprint for school reform and improvement will be more successful if it contains the following: (a) a macro system that incorporates known variables that are associated with effective school practices and exemplary school results; (b) a micro system that delineates specific indices for exploration; (c) guidelines regarding how to manage the macro system; (d) guidelines regarding how to manage the micro components of the system; (e) guidelines regarding activities that will permit full exploration of the micro components of the system; and (f) systematic checks and balances that will take into account how addressing or adjusting one micro aspect will influence other micro or macro components.

The School Improvement and Transformation System© (SITS) accommodates these requirements, providing a means to study and redesign schools systemically and systematically, with the ultimate goal of transforming the culture of the school into a professional learning community that creates continuous

learning opportunities, promotes dialogue and inquiry, encourages collaboration and team learning, establishes systems to capture and share learning, empowers people towards a collective vision, connects the organization to its environment, and constructs a "leader model" culture, in which leaders model, champion, and support learning (Marsick & Watkins, 1994).

THE SCHOOL IMPROVEMENT AND TRANSFORMATION SYSTEM©

The School Improvement and Transformation System is predicated on integrating micro, macro, and combination micro-macro components that researchers and practitioners have identified as being related to school and student success.

The SITS specifically targets four clusters that serve as theoretical and empirical foundations for successful reform in schools: leadership perspective, cultural aspects, the technology of teaching and learning, and the technology of research and planning. (See Note at end for definitions and discussion of the terms "technology of teaching and learning" and "technology of research and planning.")

Through the use of the SITS as an improvement tool and model, components of the four clusters (see Figure 1) are addressed directly in design, planning, and implementation (e.g., leadership culture, standards setting curriculum, pedagogy) or evolve into normative practices (e.g., collaborative and collegial practices, data-based and research-based decision making).

Figure 1

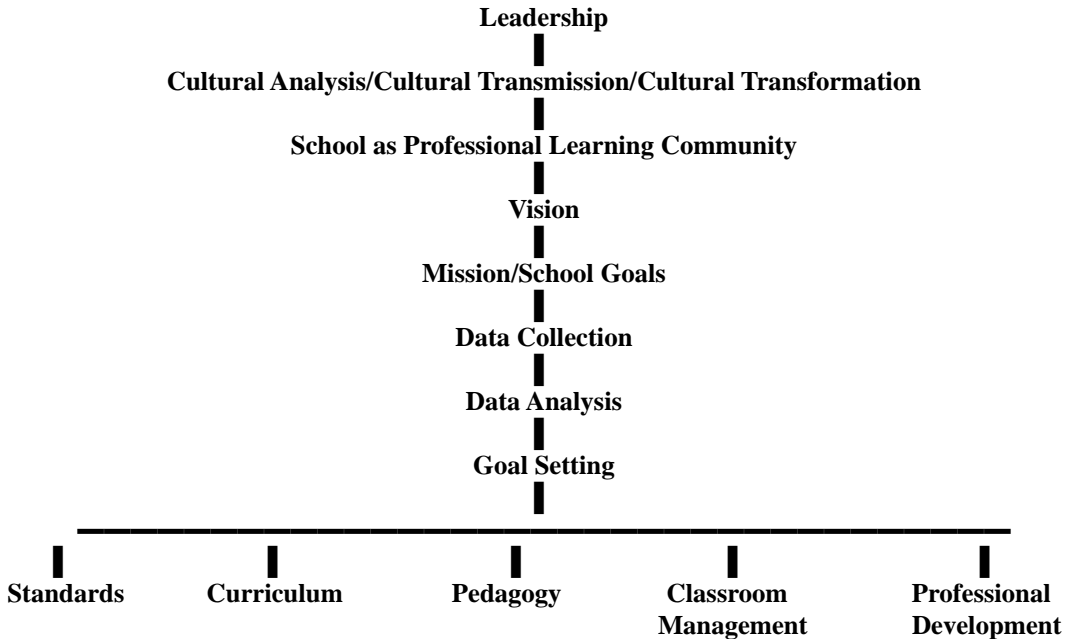Clusters associated with School Improvement and Transformation Efforts©

> **CLUSTER 1 - LEADERSHIP PERSPECTIVE**

      Leadership

      Vision

      Mission

      Shared Leadership

      Distributed Leadership

> **CLUSTER 2 - CULTURAL ASPECTS**

      Culture

      Climate

      Morale

      Collaborative Norms and Practices

      Collegial Norms and Practices

      The Professional Learning Environment

      The School as a Professional Learning Community

> **CLUSTER 3 - THE TECHNOLOGY OF TEACHING AND LEARNING**

      Standards Setting

      Curriculum

      Pedagogy

      Professional Development

      Classroom Management

> **CLUSTER 4 - THE TECHNOLOGY OF RESEARCH AND PLANNING**

      Data-based Decision Making

      Research-based Decision Making

      Assessment and Evaluation

      Systems Approaches

      Systematic Approaches

      Integrated Short-term and Long-term Planning

The system is represented in its simplest form on one vertical and one horizontal plane (See Figure 2). The vertical plane represents visionary, cultural, strategic, organizational, and operational aspects of the school. The horizontal plane represents those components that are at the heart of the technology and renewal of teaching and learning, both for the student and for the teacher or instructional support staff.

The improvement and transformation initiative is entered at the top of the vertical axis and proceeds down the axis somewhat methodically. In time, the horizontal axis becomes the technical work for which instructional staff will largely be responsible, with movement generally from left to right. All aspects of the two axes are assessed for their present condition. If at all possible, the vertical axis is assessed before work begins across the horizontal axis.

Figure 2

The School Improvement and Transformation System

Leadership

■

Cultural Analysis/Cultural Transmission/Cultural Transformation

■

School as Professional Learning Community

■

Vision

■

Mission/School Goals

■

Data Collection

■

Data Analysis

■

Goal Setting

┃

━━

■	■	■	■	■
Standards	**Curriculum**	**Pedagogy**	**Classroom Management**	**Professional Development**

PRELIMINARY SCANNING TO INITIATE THE SCHOOL IMPROVEMENT AND TRANSFORMATION SYSTEM©

A series of preliminary investigations should be initiated, which assist in determining the status of the school (See Figure 3 at the end of the document).

Because this assessment includes multiple factors, school personnel should schedule the time necessary to facilitate the careful and thoughtful collection of information and identification of areas that require addressing in the school. This process might take as long as half an academic year.

For the vertical axis, school educators would need to investigate the following:

1. What is the quality of leadership in the school? Does it contribute to the growth and health of the school?
2. What is the climate of the culture? Does it support learning and growth, for all involved in the school enterprise?
3. Does the school have the attributes of a professional learning community, as identified in the research literature?
4. Have the governing bodies articulated a vision for the school?
5. Is there a written mission for the school that is posted throughout the building, publicized, and celebrated?
6. Are there written school goals?
7. Are data collection and data analysis used systematically and systemically for making school decisions?
8. Is there annual and ongoing goal setting across the school environment that is the result of systematic data analysis and review?

For the horizontal axis, the following should be investigated:

1. Do written standards for content and student performance exist? Has data analysis been used to identify and clarify student needs prior to creation of instructional and performance objectives? Are all standards, benchmarks, objectives, and outcomes aligned with State/ National Standards and other mandated learning and assessment requirements?
2. Do curriculum documents exist for all content or subject areas? Is the curriculum based

on research and best practice? Has the curriculum been aligned with written content and performance standards, appropriately based on State and/or National Standards? Has the curriculum been aligned with written instructional and performance objectives? Are assessment and evaluation conducted on a regular basis? Are the results of regular assessment and evaluation analyzed, reported, studied, and looped back to facilitate continuing review and improvement of the curriculum?

3. Is the pedagogy of delivering the curriculum based on research and best practice? Have the pedagogical practices been aligned appropriately with the curriculum? Do pedagogical practices reflect a multiple and mixed methods orientation? Are assessment and evaluation results looped back to continuing review and improvement of pedagogy?

4. Is there a plan for professional development of administrators and instructional staff? Are professional development practices based on research and best practice? Is professional development aligned with the curriculum and the pedagogical practices currently in use? Is professional development provided when new curricula or pedagogical practices are implemented? Are assessment and evaluation of professional development plans conducted on a regular basis; is this information analyzed and looped back to continuing review and improvement of professional development?

5. Is there a management plan in place for management of students at both school-wide and classroom levels? Is the plan based on research and best practice? Are the school-level and classroom-level plans developmentally, cognitively, demographically, and socially appropriate? Are assessment and evaluation of school and classroom management plans conducted on a regular basis; is this information analyzed and looped back to continuing review and improvement of school and classroom management practices?

PUTTING THE SYSTEM INTO PRACTICE

Operationally, the system is organized around four stages: introduction, planning and design, implementation, and institutionalization (See Figure 4 at the end of the document).

Stage One comprises Introduction of the model, with activities that focus on staff and faculty development; a preliminary scan of the components on the two axis of the School Improvement and Transformation System at the level of the school system and the individual school; preliminary identification of strengths, weaknesses, and gaps relative to each of the components on the two axes; development of system-wide and school vision and mission statements, and development of goals for schooling; and, if such vision and mission statements and goals exist, revision as necessary.

Stage Two, Planning and Design, contains phases that focus on comprehensive data collection and reporting, specification of targets for intervention (e.g., leadership, climate, curriculum, professional development, etc.), research relative to each of the targets, design of improvement plans, design of a professional development plan that supports later implementation of improvement plans, and design of an integrated model for assessing and evaluating both improvement and professional development plans. Within each of these phases, discrete activities are conducted. For example, one activity of the comprehensive data collection and reporting phase is location of existing data. Another activity is organization, mapping, and analysis of relevant data. A third is study of the data by Study Teams.

Stage Three involves the review and implementation of plans and the activating of a monitoring system that includes assessment and evaluation of the processes used within the School Improvement and Transformation System as well as the educational results that were expected based on using the SITS.

Stage Four, Institutionalization, includes developing plans for ongoing review of the system and the schools, including review of effectiveness of leadership, quality of the culture, and evidence of the school as a professional learning community; setting up teams to oversee the review process and to make recommendations based on the ongoing review of process and outcomes data; generating and disseminating of semi-annual reports with recommendations; and updating of improvement and professional development plans and assessment and evaluation tools as needed.

This four-stage approach is not new. It is congruent with earlier work that promoted a multi-stage

learning approach to organizational development and organizational change (Fullan, 1982; Lewin, 1951).

The work of putting the system into practice is accomplished by setting up one steering committee at the school level and individual task forces or study teams. The steering committee should comprise one member of each task force, preferably the task force chair. The steering committee, which should include at the very least members of administration, teachers, instructional support staff, and parents, serves as a conduit for review of various investigations, develops the charges of the task forces, documents all deliberations, and integrates the work, findings, and recommendations of the task forces. If a district contains multiple schools, as is often the case in American schools, a district level committee also should be set up so that work across schools can be monitored to make certain that there is desired congruence across same-level schools and articulation between and among levels of schooling.

The steering committee will undertake an initial "scan" of the categories to determine the status quo: strengths, weaknesses, impediments, and so forth, sharing this information with the task forces. The steering committee members can be charged with studying the components on the vertical axis and communicating this information with the task forces.

All major categories represented on the horizontal plan should undergo an in-depth assessment by the task forces. The charge to the task forces will include: (a) preparing a status report of their component, including strengths and weakness; committees must report the source of identification of strengths and weaknesses (testing data, teacher observation, etc.); (b) reporting identified practices in the school that appear to be positively contributing to successful results; (c) reporting practices that appear to have a neutral effect on successful results; (d) reporting practices that may in fact be negatively impacting student outcomes; and (e) reporting practices that may be contributing to the overall "ill health" of the school culture.

Identifying weaknesses, strengths, and gaps in the system is data-driven, conducted using the tools of research, including investigations of educational literature, questionnaires, focus group interviews, and other tools of assessment and evaluation. Data also are studied to determine whether any given identified weakness is an anomaly, occurring only once or uncommonly, or a persistent and/or systemic problem. Such an action-research approach facilitates gathering multiple sets of information, therefore enhancing the quality of decisions (French & Bell, 1999).

Once needs have been identified, needs are prioritized by the steering committee. The steering committee also considers what overlaps may exist between and among needs so that addressing one need might in fact be addressing other needs. The steering committee shares these findings with the task forces and asks the task forces to prepare their recommendations for addressing the needs that they have identified. Task forces are asked to seek solutions that will address the integrated nature of learning and the overlapping needs that have previously been identified. Communication between and among the various tasks forces is critical, as the recommendations of one task force will have an impact on the recommendations of another, given the interrelated nature of what occurs in the planning and delivery of the instructional program.

Recommendations for addressing the problems are formulated by the various task forces and reviewed by the steering committee. The steering committee then develops a proposal to determine what initiatives will be undertaken, taking into account resources as well as attempting to minimize impediments that might impact adoption and implementation of interventions. The proposal is reviewed by the various task forces, feedback is sought, and the plans are refined and adopted. The professional development plan is created. Finally, an integrated model to assess and evaluate both improvement plans and the professional development plan is developed.

The SITS puts a large emphasis on the Planning and Design stage. For this reason, one academic year should be set aside for the Introduction and Planning and Design Stages. The work of implementation and activation of the monitoring systems should begin no sooner than the beginning of the second year. In fact, if a considerable amount of standards-setting and curriculum development must be undertaken, there may be some overlap of implementation of some targets and continuing work on other targets. (It is to be understood that more recently standards have been primarily dictated by State and/or National guidelines/requirements.)

DETAILED EXAMPLE OF HOW TO IMPLEMENT THE SCHOOL IMPROVEMENT AND TRANSFORMATION SYSTEM

For the purposes of this discussion, this description of how to implement the SITS is set at the school level. The initiative is presented to all interested stakeholder groups. Separate awareness presentations are made to: (a) administration, faculty, and instructional support staff, (b) non-instructional support staff, and (c) parents and community. Volunteers are solicited from the faculty and instructional support staff for five task forces: standards, curriculum, pedagogy, classroom management, and professional development. The interactive nature of these five components is stressed.

Before the work of the steering committee and tasks forces is undertaken, it is critical that administration identify personnel who have expertise in the tools of research and best practice. These people will need to be strategically placed within the framework of the initiative or might be organized as a sixth task force.

Once task forces have been organized, the steering committee is organized. Membership should include representatives from administration, teaching staff, instructional support staff, the chair of the five task forces, and one or two parent and/or community representatives. The steering committee should not exceed 12-15 people. Other than the chair of the task forces who serves to link deliberations and communications, personnel should not sit on both the steering committee and a task force.

A preliminary scan of the system, using the SITS, is conducted by the steering committee, with initial identification of obvious strengths, weaknesses, and gaps. (See Preliminary Scanning to Initiate the School Improvement and Transformation System above.)

If vision and mission statements and goals for schooling do not exist or require updating, administration should determine how these will be addressed. To save time, these activities can be conducted simultaneously with the location of all existing data and necessary documentation that will inform future deliberations. Also, at the same time, the steering committee can begin its work in dealing with the components on the vertical axis of the SITS: (a) determining the quality of leadership and its congruence to renewal and transformation of the school; (b) investigating the quality of the culture, communication systems within the culture, what might hamper transformation of the culture; (c) determining whether the school already has the attributes of a professional learning community; if not, what kinds of activities might need to be conducted in order to begin development of the school as a professional learning community; (d) providing assistance with data collection; and (e) assigning the responsibility of data collection and analysis to qualified school personnel. If no one within the system has data analysis and interpretation skills, the school must determine how these capacities will be acquired.

The next step involves comprehensive analysis of relevant data by the task forces to determine where students are lacking in their performance and outcomes and the possible sources of those problems. Task forces should meet among themselves, from left to right on the axis (see Figure 2): the standards task force should meet with the curriculum and the pedagogy task force to determine if there are gaps between the standards, the curriculum, and pedagogy. Classroom management and professional development planning can occur at a later time.

Task forces specify targets for intervention and then prioritize those targets. This information is reviewed by the steering committee.

The steering committee looks for links between and among the findings of the task forces. If necessary, the steering committee can meet with the task forces for any clarification that might be necessary. The steering committee then sends recommendations with comments to the task forces.

Recommendations are reviewed with all stakeholders, and the work of designing interventions begins. Interventions are chosen carefully by the task forces, based on rigorous research, and taking into account the needs of the children in the individual school. Task forces must provide data-driven and research-based rationales for the choices that they have made. These recommendations are forwarded to the steering committee for review and acceptance. Plans are documented.

Implementing plans can then begin. Improvement plans should be written for 3-5 years. Classroom management is now addressed: (a) Does the school have written plans? (b) Has instructional or non-instructional staff demonstrated weakness in this area? (c) Are current practices congruent with

the vision, mission, goals, and instructional program of the school? This is an appropriate time to develop school-level and classroom- level management plans if they do not exist. Such plans should be congruent with vision, mission, and school goals statements. Plans also should reflect current thinking that puts emphasis on positive learning environments, meeting students' needs, and developing internal motivation (Erwin, 2003; Marzano, 2003). Professional development plans are designed around the needs reflected in the improvement plans and any other needs identified during planning and design activities. Appropriate professional development is designed and conducted.

Once plans are implemented, the phase of institutionalization begins, including development of written plans for ongoing monitoring and review of initiatives and preparation and dissemination of progress reports.

What should be obvious even to the most casual reader is that the SITS places great emphasis on planning and design activities.

HOW THE SYSTEM CONTRIBUTES TO CULTURAL TRANSFORMATION AND THE DEVELOPMENT OF A PROFESSIONAL LEARNING COMMUNITY

There are culturally transformative results from an approach such as the SITS that is ongoing, systemic, and systematic. First, the school is treated as a system whose parts function interdependently. Second, diagnosing the "ills" of the school or school district is accomplished systematically, not randomly or haphazardly. Third, administrative and teacher leadership and participation are central to all initiatives. Fourth, all initiatives are accomplished through collaborative partnering and sharing of solutions, as well as appropriate distributing of leadership throughout the school (Elmore, 2004). Fifth, educators focus their work and "learning" on needs related to the educational program and the culture of the school. Sixth, decision making is driven by continuous cycles of assessment and evaluation based on phases of data and information gathering and of review that facilitate decision making, planning, and oversight. Seventh, accountability is imbedded in the process of improvement as administrators and instructional staff take responsibility for student learning (Reeves, 2004). And finally, and perhaps most importantly, the SITS provides a mechanism for imbedding transformative practices into the culture, therefore transforming the culture itself. In this way, a true professional learning community is created.

Such a system also targets critical school components that cannot be ignored in school reform, improvement, and transformation efforts. A systems approach provides a mechanism through which a school can actually be *transformed* by providing a balanced systemic-systematic lens through which one views school dynamics. The model accommodates much of the current literature that establishes how to transform schools by using research-based approaches (see Lambert, 2003; Marzano, 2003a; Zmuda, Kuklis, & Kline, 2004).

WHAT APPEARS TO BE MISSING IN THE SITS: INCORPORATING OTHER KNOWN FACTORS OF STUDENT AND SCHOOL SUCCESS

While some factors that are cited in the literature today as contributing to school and student success are not represented in the model, these become incorporated in the design phase. For example, parental and community involvement and the home environment are not among the components specified in the design. Administrators can find opportunities for inviting the involvement of parents and community in participation in school activities as well as in decision making and planning. Through curricula that are sensitive to the role of parents and the community relative to the developing child, teachers can incorporate lessons, activities, and practices that involve parent and community participation and invite parents and community to contribute resources that enhance the instructional program.

IMPLICATIONS FOR PLANNING

The SITS Model presents multiple and critical implications related to planning. First, administrators must gain a thorough understanding of the model, study and share research that will facilitate deep understanding of the model, identify within the organization capacity factors that will enhance implementing the model and factors that will serve as obstacles to implementation, seek outside consultation and support, and serve as proponents for the multiple layers of change that will comprise the

comprehensive improvement effort. Administrators also must identify at initial stages school personnel who may be able to assume critical leadership and support functions.

Secondly, administrators must be willing to commit the time necessary to accomplish such fundamental change; they must also be committed to "staying the course." Administrators must communicate to all constituents that implementation of the improvement and transformation plan is a long-term commitment.

Thirdly, planning must be transformed into a function that is integral to everyday life in the school, not just a function that is relegated to the beginning or the end of school years. Planning becomes one of the hallmarks of regular operation, evolving into a normative practice.

Fourth, planning must be approached not as a linear task but as an interactive and a recursive one that links all school functions and creates a new reality and a new mode of professional practice for school personnel.

Fifth, planning must be carefully coordinated with communication functions within the school. Planning must be transparent and frequently communicated to school personnel and constituency groups outside the school.

Finally, the planning function within the school must be sufficiently flexible to adjust itself to accommodate changes that occur within the school or are the result of changes in the policies of governing bodies or changes in the external environment.

IMPLICATIONS FOR PRACTICE

First, those initially charged with introducing the model and guiding preliminary stages must have both concrete and conceptual understandings of the nature of the model: what the model is designed to accomplish, the inter-related nature of the model, the complexity of the model, and the reasons why such a model has advantages over approaches that target specific organizational weaknesses that emerge over time.

Secondly, the school must work towards its development as a professional learning community (Wald & Castleberry, 2002), while simultaneously addressing the multiple components that will ultimately produce a school that is transforming and improving itself, as well as improving educational outcomes for students.

Third, the model is dependent upon a professional instructional staff that is central to the transformation of the culture and to the practice and attainment of organizational improvement. While the principal has an integral role and carries out integral functions in transformation and improvement, transformation is equally dependent on the cooperative and sustained interactions between and among instructional staff and administrative staff as well as dependent on integrative modes of thinking and performance.

Finally, all practices must continuously be scrutinized, assessed, and evaluated to determine if they are positively contributing to established goals, objectives, and targets. Assessment should be ongoing, relatively frequent, multi-faceted, and use multiple measures. Targets should be assessed both formatively and summatively. Assessment efforts must have a built-in flexibility that allows for adjustments in practice within reasonable time frames when desired results do not reach acceptable expectations or standards.

A FINAL WORD

While this paper has not directly confronted the political context of school environments today--either nationally or internationally, the SITS does provide a framework that (a) encourages local leaders and instructional staff to embrace responsibility and accountability for local results; (b) addresses the need to infuse district-level and school-based planning, participation, support, responsibility, and accountability into initiatives; and (c) nurtures and protects opportunities for local decision making.

As a transformation and improvement design, the SITS provides a framework that can serve as a buffer against individual and group political influence that can derail and/or paralyze improvement efforts. While political influence is exercised and negotiated, predominantly by school leaders, the influence is one that channels and focuses energies on building a sustainable professional community

through cultural transformation and integration of institutional structures and functions that support the improvement of teaching and learning.

<div align="center">Note</div>

The terms "technology of teaching and learning" and "technology of research and planning" are used in this article to denote technical aspects that are research-based and associated with successful practice within each cluster. As most educators understand it, the term "technology" in its generic sense refers to: (a) any technical means that people use to enhance the application of knowledge in order to meet goals, (b) the process of applying established knowledge to meet identified needs, and (c) the practical application of science and scientific methods in school practice. Research has been consistently clear that there is a science of teaching and learning and that certain "technical" practices are positively related to effective schools.

<div align="center">**REFERENCES**</div>

Deal, T. E., & Peterson, K. D. (1999). *Shaping school culture: The heart of leadership*. San Francisco, CA: Jossey-Bass.

Elmore, R. F. (2004). *School reform from the inside out: Policy, practice, and performance*. Cambridge, Massachusetts: Harvard Education Press.

Erwin, J. C. (2003). Giving students what they need. *Educational Leadership, 61*(1), 19-23.

French, W. L., & Bell, C. H. (1999). *Organization development: Behavioral science interventions for organization improvement* (6th ed.). Englewood Cliffs, NJ: Prentice-Hall.

Fullan, M. (1982*). The meaning of educational change*. New York: Teachers College Press.

Hallinger, P., & Heck, R. H. (1996). Reassessing the principal's role in school effectiveness: A review of the empirical research. *Educational Administration Quarterly, 32*(1), 27-31.

Lambert, L. (2003). *Leadership capacity for lasting school improvement*. Alexandria, VA: Association for Supervision and Curriculum Development.

Lewin, K. (1951). *Field theory in social science*. (D. Cartwright, Ed.) New York: Harper & Row.

Marsick, V.J., & Watkins, K. E. (1994, Winter). The learning organization: An integrative vision for HRD. *Human Resource Development Quarterly, 5*(4), 353-360.

Marzano, R. J. (2003). *Classroom management that works: Research-based strategies for every teacher*. Alexandria, VA: Association for Supervision and Curriculum Development.

Marzano, R. J. (2003a). *What works in schools: Translating research into action*. Alexandria, VA: Association for Supervision and Curriculum Development.

Reeves, D. B. (2004). *Accountability for learning: How teachers and school leaders can take charge.* Alexandria, VA: Association for Supervision and Curriculum Development.

Spillane, J. P. (Winter, 2003). Educational Leadership. *Educational Evaluation and Policy Analysis, 25*(4), 343-346.

Wald, P. J., & Castleberry, M. S. (eds.). (2002). *Educators as learners: Creating a professional learning community in your school*. Alexandria, VA: Association for Supervision and Curriculum Development.

Weick, C. E. (1979). *The social psychology of organizing* (2nd ed.). Reading, MA: Addison-Wesley Publishing.

Zmuda, A., Kuklis, R., & Kline, E. (2004). *Transforming schools: Creating a culture of continuous improvement*. Alexandria, VA: Association for Supervision and Curriculum Development.

Figure 3

SCHOOL IMPROVEMENT AND TRANSFORMATION SYSTEM©

LEADERSHIP

- CULTURAL ANALYSIS
- CULTURAL TRANSMISSION
  - SCHOOL AS PROFESSIONAL LEARNING COMMUNITY
  - VISION
  - MISSION / SCHOOLING GOALS
  - DATA COLLECTION
  - DATA ANALYSIS
  - GOAL SETTING
- CULTURAL TRANSFORMATION

SET STANDARDS
- Write Objectives
- Data Analysis

CURRICULUM
- Based on Research/ Best Practice
- Aligned with Standards
- Formative/ Summative Eval.
- Analysis/ Feedback Loop

PEDAGOGY
- Based on Research/ Best Practice
- Aligned with Curriculum Needs
- Multiple/ Mixed Methods
- Formative/ Summative Eval.
- Analysis/ Feedback Loop

PROFESSIONAL DEVELOPMENT
- Based on 3-5 Year Plan
- Formative/ Summative Eval.
- Analysis/ Feedback Loop
- Based on Research Best Practice
- Aligned with Curr./ Pedagogy
- Formative/ Summative Eval.
- Analysis/ Feedback Loop

SCHOOL/CLASSROOM MANAGEMENT
- Based on Research/ Best Practice
- School/Classroom-level Plans
- Developmentally/Cognitively/ Demographically/Socially Appropriate
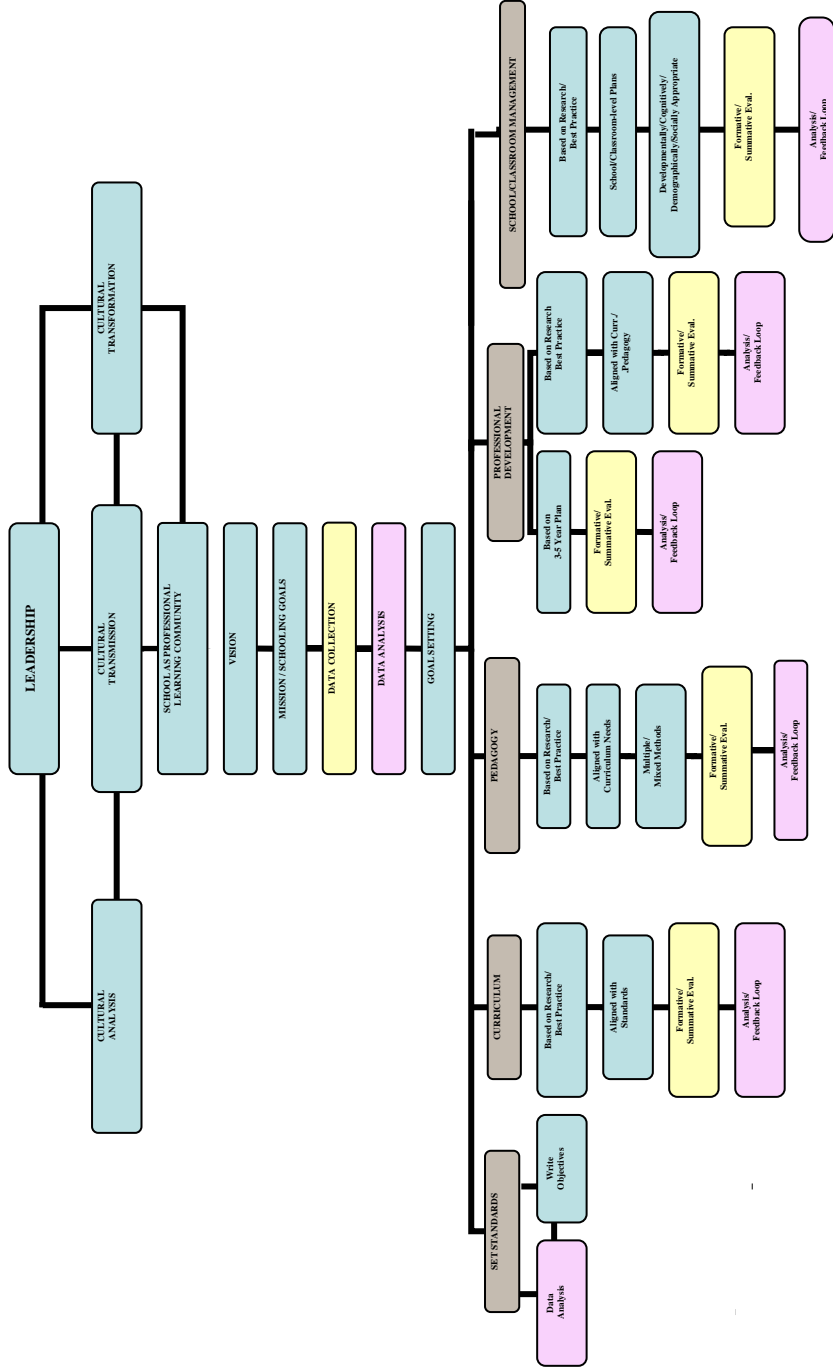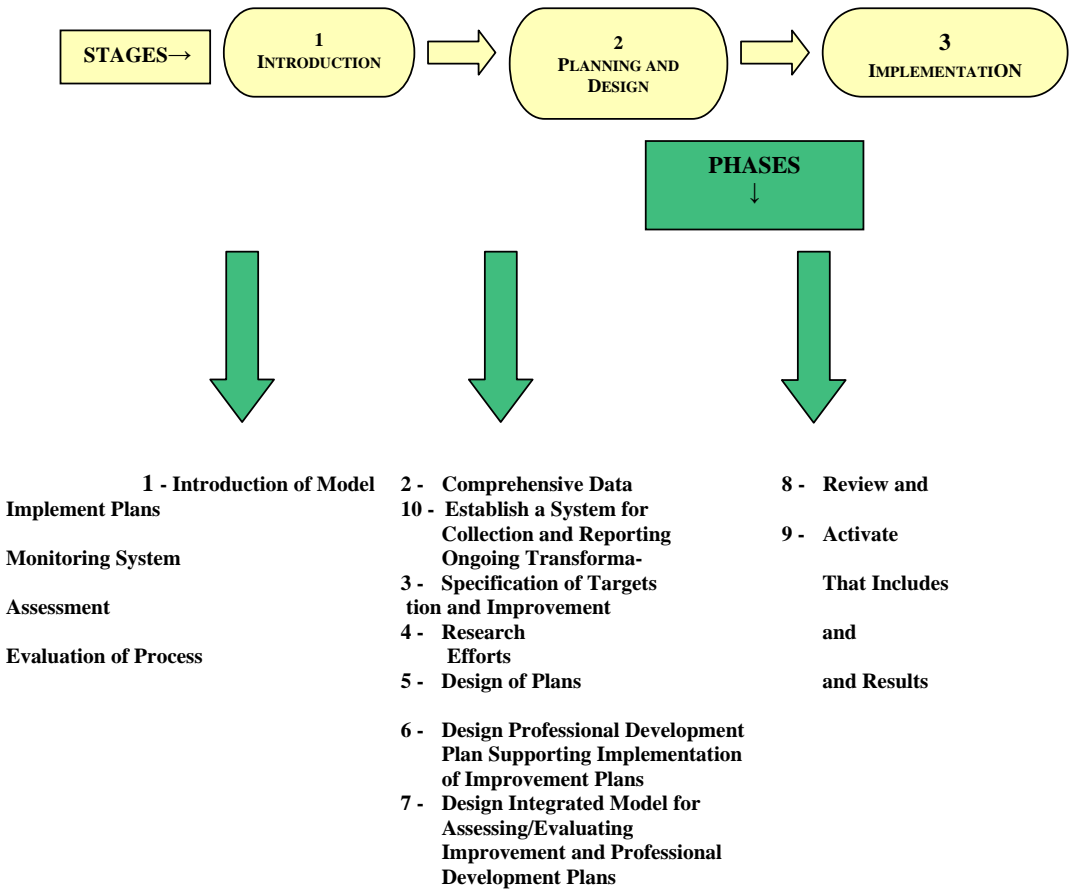- Formative/ Summative Eval.
- Analysis/ Feedback Loop

Figure 4

Stages and Phases of School Improvement and Transformation Process©

| STAGES→ | 1 INTRODUCTION | 2 PLANNING AND DESIGN | 3 IMPLEMENTATION |

PHASES ↓

1 - Introduction of Model
Implement Plans

Monitoring System

Assessment

Evaluation of Process

2 - Comprehensive Data
10 - Establish a System for
   Collection and Reporting
   Ongoing Transforma-
3 - Specification of Targets
  tion and Improvement
4 - Research
   Efforts
5 - Design of Plans

6 - Design Professional Development
  Plan Supporting Implementation
  of Improvement Plans
7 - Design Integrated Model for
  Assessing/Evaluating
  Improvement and Professional
  Development Plans

8 - Review and

9 - Activate

  That Includes

  and

  and Results