



# Organizing the School Year: A Monthly Principal Checklist

## Why go this route?

- The Principal will be more effective by being organized, pro-active and efficient and therefore be free to spend more time on instructional leadership.
- The checklist will serve as a master plan to insure that important building/district activities are completed.
- Using a checklist helps principals be systematic about closing the gap between what we know and what we do.

## You'll know you've arrived when...

- Meetings and activities are completed in an organized and timely manner.
- Staff, parents and community routinely get personalized communications.
- Stakeholders are very familiar with what is going on in the school.
- The principal's day-to-day behaviors communicate that she/he has a firm grasp of the vision of the school and can translate it into programs and activities.
- The school climate reflects an organized, efficient and stress-free tone.

## Construction Zone

### *It's about TIME*

- There are many activities included in this packet which take varying amounts of time to complete. Most need to take place before school starts in August.
- It takes time to be organized. Spending this time now will save you time later.
- The more that can be completed before school starts in the fall, the better. Once the basic work is completed in August, the rest of the year will run more smoothly.
- At the beginning of each month, transfer tasks from the month's list into your working calendar. This list is meant to organize the principal's focus, so up to a half of each day should be devoted to them, while "fire-fighting" with the other half.
- Make sure to save copies of your packets, newsletters and letters. They can be modified and used again.


### *Potential COSTS*

- Cost for copying of materials—budget for regular parent newsletters, staff calendars, etc.



## The Process

*A step-by-step guide  
to organizing your school  
year via checklists*

**NOTE:** Steps marked with a  are accompanied by one or more inserts, included in this packet.

### 1 Browse through all ten months of checklists.

Get yourself a cup of coffee and find somewhere you can think quietly and reflectively. Read INSERT for Step 1 as a note from the experienced principal-authors of this packet to you, the user. As you browse, customize the checklists; cross off any that don't apply to you, and highlight 3-4 each month that are your highest priorities.

### 2 Post the first month next to your desk.

Don't file it or put it in a pile of papers; find a place for it where your eye will rove over it as you talk on the phone or while you're scheduling your day. This is important in the middle of everything you do for everyone else. Keeping yourself on a chosen-track (and documenting your accomplishments) is something you can do for yourself.

### 3 File the checklists for the remaining months. Each month you'll trade the finished one for a clean one for the new month.

### 4 Assign tasks from this month's checklist to specific times in your monthly (weekly) calendar.

This is the step that keeps the checklists from becoming one more guilt-inducing "should." By picking a time, you are keeping faith with your intentions. Start modestly—perhaps you'll assign only your high priorities for the month. If possible, you may add others from the checklist.

### 5 Protect the time firmly, but not rigidly.


No responsive principal ever executes a day exactly as planned. But when you see that you've made a date with yourself for "Checklist Work," begin to think of it as roughly the same priority as, say, a parent conference – not like a summons from the superintendent or an emergency – but serious business for which you'll turn other things away because these things ARE your job, and other people can't do theirs if you don't do these. When something does shove them off your plan for the day, reschedule to another specific time.

### 6 Check them off the list when they're done!

Enjoy the reward. Letting the checks visibly accumulate is a quiet way to celebrate to yourself (whenever your eye falls on the list) that you are making your priorities a reality.

### 7 Think ahead to next year.

As you develop handouts or announcements or flyers to implement the steps on any given month's checklist, put a file copy into a folder marked with the month. At the end of the month, as you replace the checklist with the next month's, take a minute to jot any "lessons learned" on the used checklist -- things you'd do differently next time. Tuck it into the folder and set that folder aside to be part of next year's series. When you take it out again, you'll have a head start.



## Getting more mileage from organizing your school year

*How getting organized benefits your school*

*in regard to the following initiatives:*

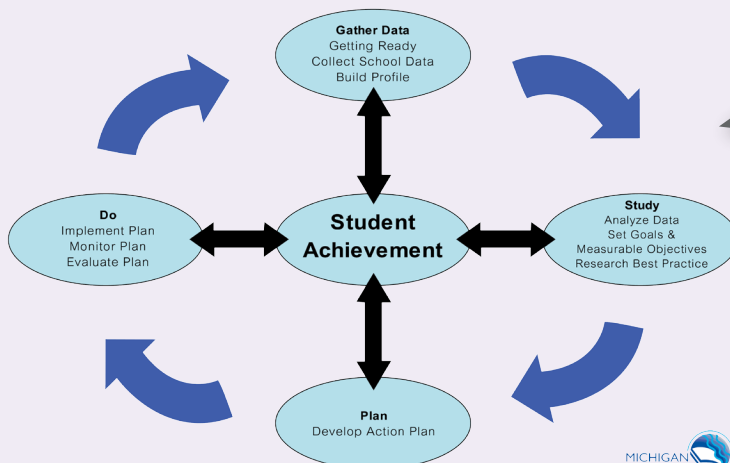
### **Elementary and Secondary Education Act (ESEA)**

- ESEA increases planning and reporting responsibilities, the importance of state testing and teacher requirements. Keeping up with these demands will require the utmost in organization. Having a systematic yearlong plan into which you can insert things you have to do will help keep you from inadvertently missing something important. (No one can keep all this in his/her head.) Organization is the key.

### **State Accreditation System**

- Filing your school's accreditation report on time is the principal's responsibility, even though he/she needs to keep in mind that collaborative teamwork is important. A yearlong plan can ensure that you know what should be getting done all along the way instead of at the last minute.

### **Michigan Continuous School Improvement Process (Mi-CSI) Michigan School Improvement Framework**



Adding these steps to your yearlong systematic plan will help keep you organized. This packet will help with that much needed organization when crunch time comes around!



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## Resources

### *Books, Articles, Websites*

#### ***The Principal's Book of Lists***

Ramsey, John Wiley & Sons, 2002.

This information source is packed with the most used and useful lists available to help principals work smarter and faster in many aspects of the job as a school administrator.

#### ***The Elementary School Principal's Calendar: A Month by Month Planner for the School Year***

Michael Terc and Ida Ayers. Sage Press, 2001.

Follow Dr. McEwan's seven steps for effective communication with your staff.

#### ***The Middle School Principal's Calendar***

Michael Terc and Robert Ricken, Sage Press, 2003.

These books lay out everyday challenges and administrative necessities to help plan strategically for the academic year. A handy checklist for each month is included along with a rich resource of sample documents to help with communication.

#### ***Gardening in the Minefield: A Survival Guide for School Administrators***

Schmidt, Laurel. Heinemann, 2002.

This book uses insight and humor to give creative, practical strategies for surviving the daily grind, while honing a vision of a school that works. Topics include: mastering the communication glut and nurturing productive relationships.

### *Associations*

Michigan Association of State and Federal Program Specialists (MAS/FPS)

[www.masfps.org](http://www.masfps.org).

Excellent resource for state and federal guidelines and dates.

National Association of Elementary School Principals  
<http://www.naesp.org>

National Association of Secondary School Principals  
<http://www.nassp.org>

### *People*

#### **For more information, contact:**

Michigan Department of Education

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517-373-8480

Curriculum and Instruction Unit  
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Office of Assessment  
and Accountability  
517-373-0048

Office of Early Childhood  
and Family Services  
517-241-3592

Office of Field Services  
517-373-3921

Office of Professional Preparation  
and Teacher Certification  
517-373-6505

Office of Special Education  
and Early Intervention Services  
517-373-9433

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