



STATE OF MICHIGAN
DEPARTMENT OF EDUCATION
LANSING

RICK SNYDER
GOVERNOR

MICHAEL P. FLANAGAN
STATE SUPERINTENDENT

March 4, 2013

MEMORANDUM

TO: State Board of Education

FROM: Casandra E. Ulbrich
Chair, State Board of Education Legislative Committee

SUBJECT: Approval of the School Improvement Legislative Report

The Michigan Department of Education (MDE), Office of Education Improvement and Innovation, selected a sample of 111 building-level School Improvement Plans, representing 46 school districts, for review during the month of September 2012. All buildings selected were identified as Priority Schools in the bottom 5 percent of the schools on the Top-to-Bottom List for the 2011-2012 school year, and these schools represent 87 percent of the 2012 cohort of Priority Schools. The School Improvement Plans are complex and detailed, including Mission and Vision Statements, other Public Act (PA) 25 of 1990 requirements, and Title I requirements in addition to the Goals Management section. This review focused on the Goals Management section which specifies intentions for teaching and learning practice.

The report summarizes observations and outlines next steps as the MDE moves beyond Priority Schools to a larger sample of schools. This year, reviewers assessed the integrity of the planning process. Next year, the MDE will broaden its scope to assess the impact of a school's improvement plan on teaching and learning, and the effectiveness of school improvement across the state.

This report is completed in compliance with PA 25, which requires that the State Board of Education shall annually review a random sampling of School Improvement Plans and submit a report on school improvement activities to the Legislature. The report has been reviewed by the Board's Legislative Committee, and is due to the Legislature by April 1, 2013.

It is recommended that the State Board of Education approve the Report to the Legislature on School Improvement Plans, and direct staff to forward the report to the Legislature, as described in the memorandum dated March 4, 2013, from Casandra E. Ulbrich, Chair, State Board of Education Legislative Committee.

Attachment

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608 WEST ALLEGAN STREET • P.O. BOX 30008 • LANSING, MICHIGAN 48909
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April 1, 2013

State Board of Education Report to the Legislature

School Improvement Plans

Office of Education Improvement & Innovation
School Improvement Support Unit

School Improvement Planning in Michigan: Piloting A Method for Assessing its Quality and Power

Introduction

School Improvement Plans have been required in Michigan since 1990 (Public Act 25 of 1990). In 2010, the legislature prescribed additional planning requirements for Persistently Low Achieving (PLA) schools in the bottom 5 percent of the state's Top-to-Bottom list: Reform/Redesign plans are designed to support rapid transformation by addressing not just the academic strategies included in School Improvement Plans but also infrastructure, governance and performance appraisal efforts.

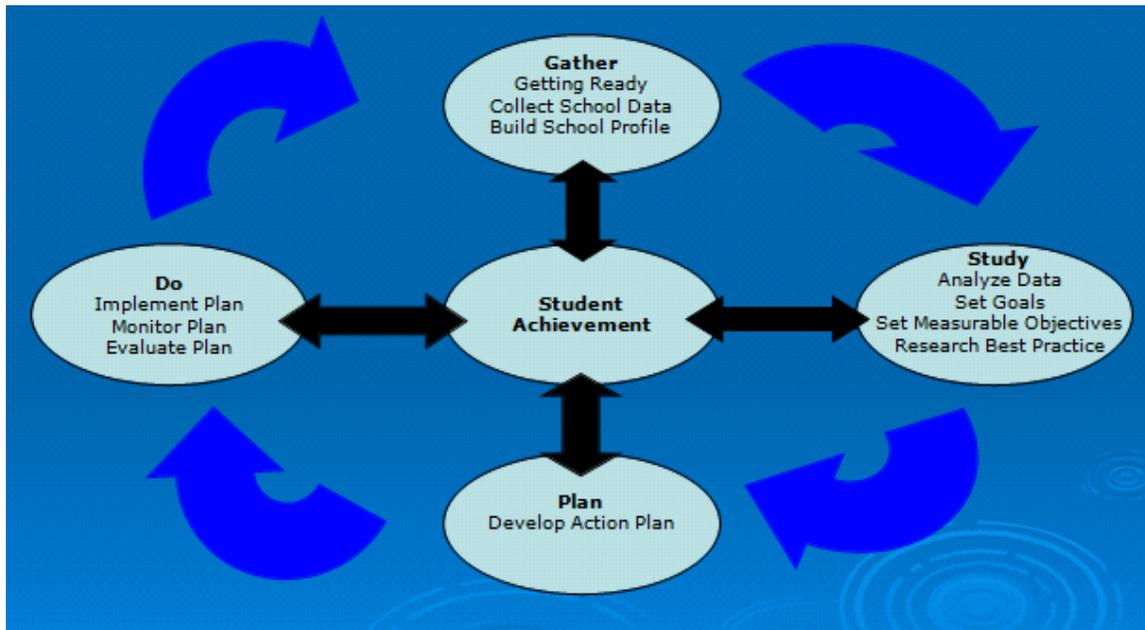
To succeed, these plans must be integrated into one coherent way forward; the Reform/Redesign plans must form a context for the School Improvement Plans, and the academic intentions identified in the Reform/Redesign plan must be evident in robust, specific strategies and activities in the school's School Improvement Plan. For that reason, the Michigan Department of Education (MDE) has attempted to bring together the various federal and state requirements for school improvement into one planning process so schools can speak with one common language, namely One Voice - One Plan: Michigan's Continuous School Improvement process.

The School Improvement Plan is intended to be the vehicle that drives the continuous improvement process, in the case of Priority Schools, accelerated by Reform/Redesign elements that promote rapid change. The MDE intends, therefore to undertake continuous improvement of its own by assessing the quality and power of School Improvement Planning and systematically working to increase both. We developed and tested an assessment tool this fall with the subset of Michigan schools with whom we work the closest: our 2012 cohort of Priority (what used to be identified as PLA) Schools. This report summarizes our observations and outlines next steps as we expand beyond Priority Schools to sample all schools. We begin with an overview of what a powerful School Improvement Plan looks like.

Quality School Improvement Planning

Michigan's Continuous School Improvement (MI CSI) is a process cycle that provides the foundation to address school improvement and promote student achievement through a comprehensive and systemic approach consisting of the following main tasks:

1. Gather - Collect Data and Build School Profile
2. Study - Analyze Data, Set Goals and Objectives
3. Plan - Develop an Improvement Plan
4. Do - Implement, Monitor, and Evaluate this Plan



During both Study and Plan in the MI CSI cycle, schools engage in Goals Management work. These areas of Goals Management are the parts of the School Improvement Plan that directly impact teaching and learning at the classroom level. Determining the degree of alignment with the criteria for strong Goals, Objectives, Strategies, and Activities will give us information on the presence/absence of the elements of a planning process that is capable of guiding real change in schools – whether that change is rapid and transformational (as required for Priority Schools), or reflective and incremental (for mainstream Michigan schools). The results of the evaluations of these plans will help the MDE provide support in the School Improvement Planning Process to all schools in the state.

The MDE believes that without high quality goals and carefully chosen strategies, no amount of implementation or monitoring will result in improved results. The reviewers therefore addressed themselves to each of the four elements of Goals Management:

- **Goals** are broad statements focused on a content area shown by the school’s achievement data to need improvement. An example would be:
 - All students will be proficient in math.
- **Measureable Objectives** identify what students will be able to achieve in the content area goal, as measured by what assessment(s) and yielding what results. Good objectives are specific, measurable, attainable, results-bound and time-bound. For example, good objectives for a math goal might be:
 - The percentage of students without disabilities achieving at least 85 percent on numbers and numeration items on the Michigan Education Assessment Program (MEAP) will increase from 62 percent to 90 percent by the end of the 2014-2015 school year.
 - The percentage of students with disabilities achieving at least 85 percent on numbers and numeration items on the MEAP will increase

from 48 percent to 80 percent by the end of the 2014-2015 school year.

- The percentage of students without disabilities achieving at least 80 percent on numbers and numeration items on the end of unit district assessments will increase from 74 percent to 81 percent by the end of the 2012-2013 school year.
- The percentage of students with disabilities achieving at least 80 percent on numbers and numeration items on the end of unit district assessments will increase from 62 percent to 70 percent by the end of the 2012-2013 school year.
- **Strategies** describe what teachers do in the classroom with students in the presence of content. If strategies are implemented with fidelity:
 - Teachers have confidence that they are teaching the instructional strategy in the right way
 - Students are engaged while the teacher is teaching
 - The content that is being taught is appropriate for the grade level being taught.Good strategies are research based and describe observable teaching techniques. For example, a strategy chosen to achieve the math measurable objectives listed above might look like this:
 - Teachers/staff will utilize manipulatives while instructing the Common Core State Standards related to numbers and numeration at all grade levels.
- **Activities** list action steps that need to be done in preparation for teachers using their strategies, so that teachers are ready to use the strategy in the classroom with students, have a strong plan for implementation of the strategy, and have a plan to monitor the implementation of the strategy. For example, activities associated with the manipulatives strategy could include:
 - At each grade level, teachers will determine needed manipulatives and submit the order to the office no later than September 30.
 - Teachers will observe an instructional coach teach a manipulatives-based lesson with their class.
 - Lesson plans will reflect the use of manipulatives at least twice weekly.
 - Student use of manipulatives will be the focus of math walkthroughs at least once a month.

Review Process

The MDE, Office of Education Improvement and Innovation (OEII), selected a sample of 111 building-level School Improvement Plans, representing 46 school districts, for review during the month of September, 2012. All buildings selected were identified as Priority Schools, in the bottom 5 percent of the schools on the Top-to-Bottom List for the 2011-2012 school year, and these schools represent 87 percent of the 2012 cohort of Priority Schools. The School Improvement Plans are complex and detailed documents, including Mission and Vision statements, other PA 25 requirements and Title I additional requirements in addition to the Goals Management section. Our review focused on Goals Management because

components of the Goals Management Section directly address matters of teaching and learning in the classroom.

The OEII recruited and contracted with 12 reviewers with significant school improvement experience, including persons with current or past employment as staff of school districts, Intermediate School Districts, the MDE, universities and community colleges. The 12 reviewers were provided one day of training on use of the review rubric developed by the OEII. Training emphasized inter-rater reliability on use of the rubric and development of a common understanding of the criteria used for review of plan Goals, Measurable Objectives, Strategies, and Activities, corresponding with these items required in the School Improvement Plans each school submits. OEII staff provided a training manual for use and reference by the reviewers to assist them in the review process. Reviewers report that it took from one to seven hours to complete each review, depending on the size of the school reviewed and the complexity and detail of the plan submitted.

Components of the School Improvement Plan

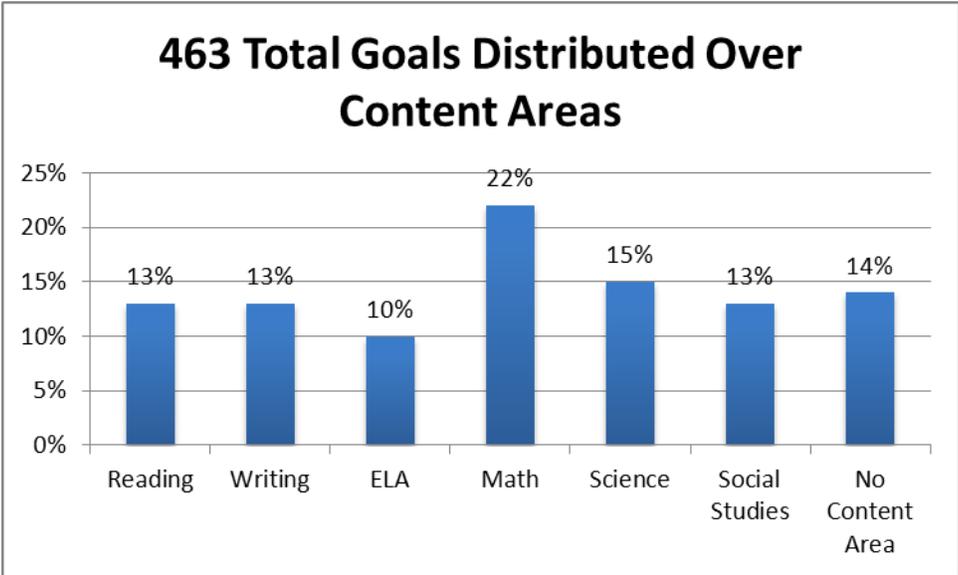
Goals

The School Improvement Plan begins with setting goals that describe the desired results of the successful implementation of the plan. **In this case the criteria for a well-designed goal is that it should address an academic content area, and clearly describe a level of student achievement in that content area.**

The evaluation of the plans showed that this group of Priority schools set three to eight goals in their plans with an average of 4.8 goals per school. Of the 111 sample plans, 84 of the schools developed goals, all of which met these criteria while 2 schools set no goals meeting the criteria. The remaining 25 schools were partially successful in writing goals that met the required criteria. Overall 86 percent of the total goals in all of the School Improvement Plans met the criteria.

Of the 14 percent of goals that did not meet the criteria, these goals addressed non-content issues such as citizenship and personal accountability, school climate, positive behavior support, technology, attendance, dropout prevention, increasing graduation rate, career & employment soft skills, parental involvement, school-wide data systems, staff collaboration, physical education, and customer service either in addition to content or instead of content.

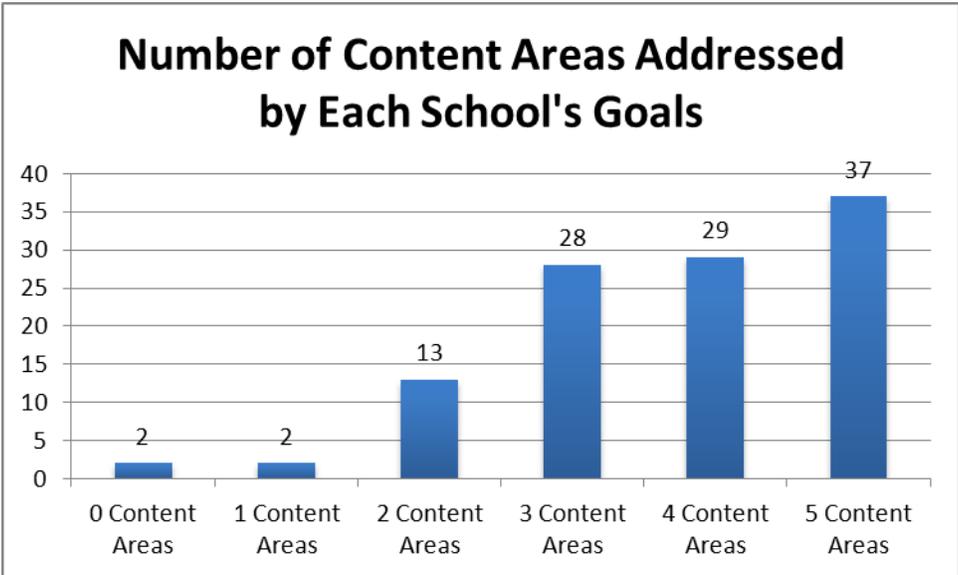
The schools' planning efforts were distributed over all content areas, with math a bit more predominant and English Language Arts (ELA) a bit less.



Ninety-four of the schools wrote their goals so that the plan as a whole addressed three or more content areas. This means that 85 percent of the plans are working in a cross-disciplinary way and planning beyond ELA and math. This leaves us with several questions to consider:

- Do schools with more or fewer goals tend to be more successful?
- Are there particular combinations of goals that contribute to student achievement more than others?
- Is there an optimal number of goals correlated with higher student achievement?

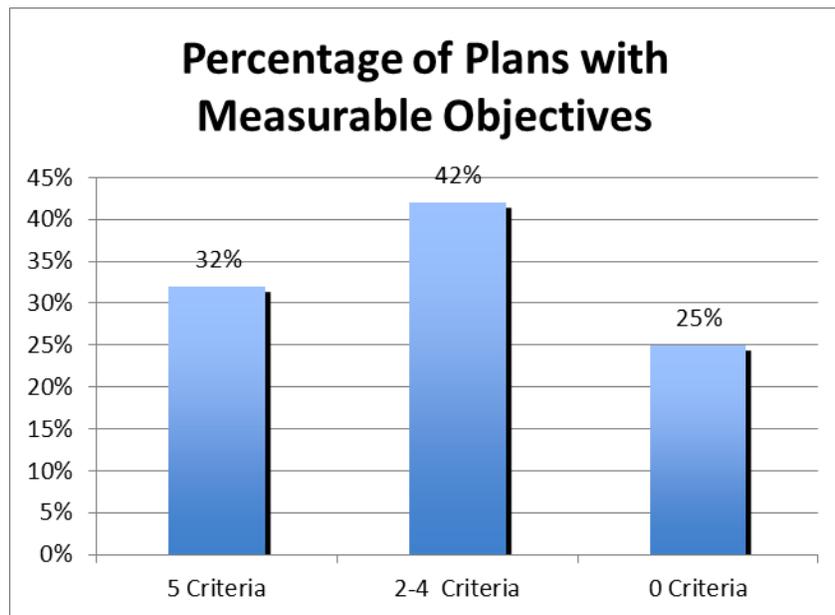
Next year’s study will be designed to explore these correlations.



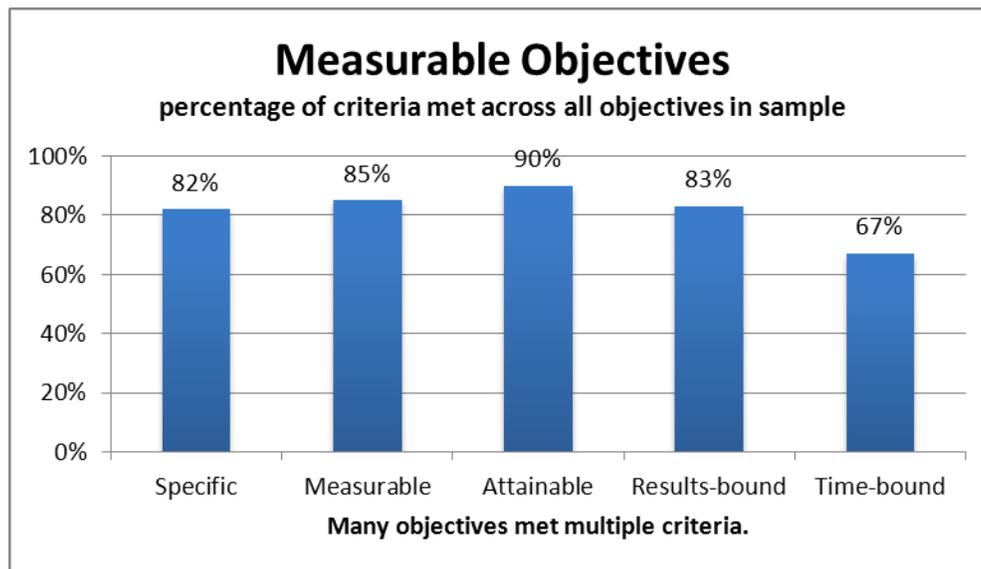
Measurable Objectives

Objectives are derived from the goals and should break the goals down into achievement targets for the students. **A quality measurable objective includes details (who will do what by when etc.), describes how progress toward the goal will be assessed, is realistic given the resources available, identifies expected outcomes, and states when they expect to accomplish the goal.**

The School Improvement Plans in this study included from three to 19 measurable objectives with an average of five in each School Improvement Plan. Across all of the School Improvement Plans in this study almost half of the measurable objectives met at least some of the criteria with consistency varying widely from school to school. Thirty-six of the schools wrote measurable objectives all of which met all 5 of the criteria while 28 of the schools wrote no measurable objectives that met the criteria. The balance of 47 schools met at least some of the criteria in their measurable objectives.



The chart below shows the rates at which the criteria were satisfied across the whole pool of measurable objectives. Attainability was the criteria that was met the most often and time-bound the least.



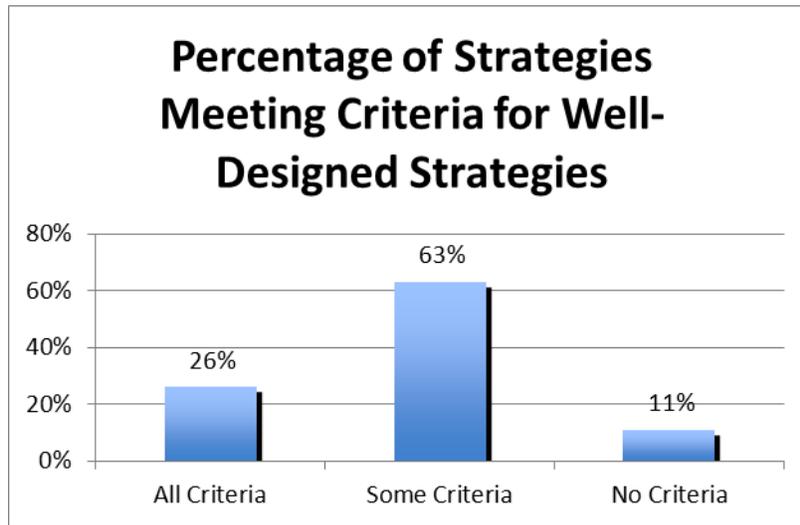
Strategies

The strategies in the School Improvement Plan describe what the teachers will do in the classroom with the students in the presence of content. For example:

- Teachers/staff will utilize manipulatives while instructing the Common Core State Standards related to numbers and numeration at all grade levels.
- Teachers will introduce academic vocabulary to students using Marzano’s six-step process.

The School Improvement Plans in the study group described three to 40 strategies per school with an average number of 11. Twenty-nine of the schools wrote strategies which met all of the criteria, 70 schools met the criteria for some of their strategies and 12 schools didn’t meet the criteria with any of their strategies. Overall, 70 percent of the strategies across the sample of School Improvement Plans met the criteria for a well-designed strategy.

Schools’ choice of the number of strategies to include in a plan varied widely. The reviewers were asked to quantify this as we hope in the future to be able to give schools feedback as to what number might be more powerful. A deeper analysis of this can provide information about the relative success of schools that focus tightly on fewer strategies as opposed to undertaking many strategies simultaneously.



Activities

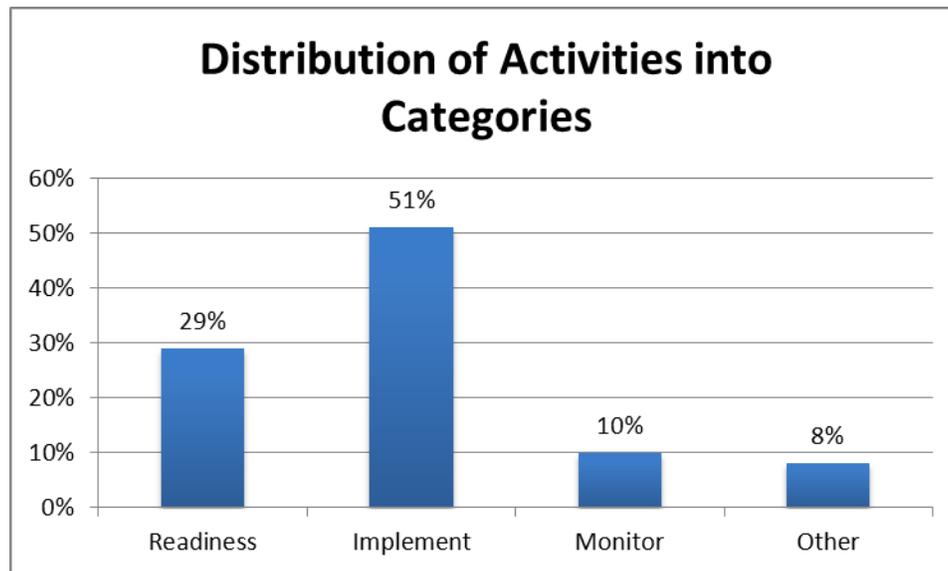
Finally, activities are the daily ongoing actions and behaviors that the teaching and support staff will adopt to support the strategies and ultimately, achieve the goals of the School Improvement Plan. Activities are intended to ensure that the strategies are implemented with fidelity and have the potential to positively impact student achievement. They fall into four categories:

- **READINESS** – Ensure readiness for implementation and that participants have the knowledge and skills to implement the strategy. Possible activities may include professional development, purchase of materials, planning and communication processes.
- **IMPLEMENT** – Ensure successful implementation of the selected strategy. Possible activities may include communication, identification and setup of support structures, professional support, removal of barriers to implementation, instructional technology, supports for at-risk students and parent involvement.
- **MONITORING** – Ensure that the strategy is implemented with fidelity and monitor the strategy’s impact on student achievement. Possible activities may include walkthroughs, instructional rounds, grade level meetings, documentation of strategy implementation, classroom demonstrations, gather/analyze achievement and process data, develop schedule for the process of monitoring/evaluation.
- **OTHER** – Activities that do not describe readiness, implementation or monitoring.

Ultimately the activities must help the staff get ready to or actually implement the strategies in their classrooms, refine their classroom practices, share their learning and experience with colleagues and build accountability into the system to assure that the strategy is being implemented with fidelity. Some of the activities met more than one criterion.

As would be expected there are many activities included in the sample of School Improvement Plans with the majority of them addressing readiness and the implementation of the strategies. The number of activities in each School

Improvement Plan ranged from as few as three to as many as 119 with the average being 11 per plan.



Conclusions

The sampling of School Improvement Plans range from bare-bones minimal to very complex. Both extremes raise the concern that the plan will not be effective either because it isn't adequate to meet student needs or that it is so complex that it will be very difficult to implement. Most of the plans fall between the extremes and reflect a basic or better understanding of the school improvement process and skill with describing it in their School Improvement Plans. There appears to be about 10-25 percent of the plans, however, that failed to demonstrate a solid understanding of a significant element of the school improvement process.

In this sample of School Improvement Plans the strongest area of skill is in goal setting with 84 percent of the goals addressing 3 or more content areas. From there the understanding of the criteria for measurable objectives and strategies is clearly weaker with only 1/3 of the measurable objectives satisfying their criteria and fewer than 1/3 (26 percent) of strategies meeting their criteria. Tying objectives to a definite time-line supports focus as the year progresses. The lack of a timeline and plan for monitoring creates concern that the energy and focus on an objective and its strategies and activities may dissipate over time.

The majority of activities focus on readiness to implement and actual implementation. Monitoring (including evaluation) needs to be strengthened in order to assure fidelity and consistency of practice. The concern with schools that have included very high numbers of activities is that this will simply be an unmanageable number of activities for the staff to implement.

The OEII intends to use the results of this study of School Improvement Plans to develop technical supports that target the areas of greatest need for Michigan's Priority schools. As the school improvement process continues and student achievement scores can be compared to these School Improvement Plans the MDE

OEII will develop a deeper understanding of the needs of building and district staff in their school improvement process and the plans, and their subsequent implementation and can be refined and strengthened.

As the MDE OEII designs the next round of School Improvement Plan Reviews, there will be a broader group of schools and districts included in the pool of reviewed plans in addition to the Priority Schools. Reviewers will look at schools' School Process Profile and School Data Profile (elements of the Comprehensive Needs Assessment) to determine if the achievement gaps and needs identified by the school do indeed match their goals, measurable objectives, and strategies. This 2012 School Improvement Plan Review provides a first look and serves as the "benchmark." Therefore, the MDE provides no specific response or recommendations back to the schools reviewed.

The Office of Field Services has developed a state evaluation tool that schools are encouraged to use to evaluate the success of their School Improvement Plan. Where schools have used the state evaluation tool, we will broaden our review to include questions such as:

- Does the strategy chosen match the expected student outcomes described in the Measurable Objective?
- Were strategies being implemented as intended?
- What is the evidence that the selected strategies will meet the needs of students?
- Was there evidence of sufficiency of administrative support, professional learning and staff collaboration to achieve intended results?

This will give us additional information about the correlation of fidelity of School Improvement Plan implementation and the effectiveness as measured by student achievement.

Combining an assessment of a school's ability to meet the criteria of the school improvement process with an evaluation of the impact of a school's improvement plan on teaching and learning will allow the MDE to determine the effectiveness of school improvement throughout the state.

The OEII is cultivating knowledge and expertise with the school improvement process deeply and widely in Michigan's districts and schools so that the process may continue and succeed even with changes in personnel over time. This review of a sample of School Improvement Plans is an opportunity for the MDE to determine where we are in this process in these early days of a new approach to school improvement.

Please direct questions related to this report to Joann Neuroth, Supervisor, OEII, School Improvement Unit at NeurothJ@michigan.gov or 517-335-2957.