

Find Out More!

For more information regarding school improvement, or to find out how your district can participate in the Center for School Improvement Leadership Institute, visit the online center at www.aft.org/topics/csi/index.htm or e-mail the center at aftcsi@aft.org.



The AFT Center for School Improvement



A Union of Professionals

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The AFT Center for School Improvement

The AFT and its state and local affiliates have a long-standing commitment to improving public education, particularly in low-achieving schools. We advocate, broker, collaborate and, in many cases, deliver effective school improvement programs designed specifically to address the needs of struggling schools.

Through the Center for School Improvement, the AFT provides technical assistance, professional development and other information to state, district and school officials and educators, as well as parents and the community, especially those working in schools in need of improvement as defined by adequate yearly progress definitions and accountability provisions in the No Child Left Behind Act.

The School Improvement Process

We know that school improvement must be part of an overall strategy jointly developed by stakeholders who are willing to accept the responsibility for improving schools. Instead of unrelated, random acts of improvement, making schools better requires a commitment to a process at the school site that coordinates and guides improvement efforts using a research-based approach. Although no two schools are the same, and schools can start at various places in the process, schools that show improvement generally follow the six steps shown below:

1. Create or renew a labor-management partnership.

School superintendents and teachers union presidents must work together to make effective school improvement a reality. AFT leaders should engage the superintendent and others on the district administrative team in conversations about how to work together to assist schools in need of improvement.

2. Form an effective team.

Improving schools requires a team effort with active participation and support from labor, management, parents and community.

School improvement teams should operate in a climate that fosters collaboration and accomplishment. The characteristics of effective school improvement teams include:

- A shared mission
- A climate of trust and openness
- Open and honest communication
- Shared responsibility
- A risk-taking climate
- Ability to evaluate progress
- Members who are interdependent
- Consensual decision-making
- Participative leadership

3. Analyze data.

To improve a school or district, team members must analyze student, teacher, administrative, parent, school, district and community data. The process of examining and analyzing data allows teams to identify very specific areas for improvement and develop a plan that is uniquely designed for the school.

4. Create or update a school improvement plan.

After a thorough analysis of all the data, the school improvement team should use this information to develop a comprehensive school improvement plan. The plan should identify goals for the school to achieve; develop indicators to measure whether the school is making progress toward achieving these goals; and include steps that will be taken to achieve each goal.

5. Implement the plan.

Implementing a school improvement plan can be challenging work, but it is smoother if the team has followed the school improvement process described here and in the Center for School Improvement Leadership Institute. It is important that the school improvement team members continue to revisit their plan and performance indicators to ensure that they remain focused on their goals.

6. Evaluate progress.

Even when a school sees improvement, its work is not done. The cycle of improvement must continue, and the team also must continue to meet to refine its goals based on the data. Evaluating progress involves analyzing data through performance indicators identified in the school improvement plan to see if students, teachers and administrators have made progress toward achieving desired goals.

Center for School Improvement Leadership Institute

The Center for School Improvement Leadership Institute is the AFT's premier large-scale professional development and technical assistance program to help school improvement teams with their difficult, but important, work. School improvement teams attend a comprehensive four-day national "institute" that covers the school improvement process.

The institute is organized around five highly interactive sessions focused on the work of improving schools:

1. Skills and Structures for Effective Communication
2. Team Building: Getting the Job Done
3. Data Analysis for Comprehensive Educational Planning
4. Professional Development To Support Student Achievement
5. Action Planning

