

Analyze and Apply Critical Judgment

1

Real World Challenge Bailey's Story, Part 1

Bailey Pittman knew that changing her role from a high school principal to a performance consultant assigned to facilitate the improvement of another high school with a 56 percent graduation rate would be challenging. Over the last five years, she had led her school team to turn around the performance of her school (a persistently low-achieving school) to become a high-performing school recognized with many performance awards. However, Bailey knew that each school is unique and was eager to discover what was holding this school back. She knew that one of her colleagues, Frank Perez, whom she had attended graduate school with, had made the switch from leading a school to performance consulting nearly five years ago. The week before starting in her new role, Bailey decided to call Frank and ask his advice about the job transition.

Frank was delighted to hear from Bailey and eager to share what he had learned. "I know you are going to do a great job in your new role," Frank said. "I would be happy to tell you what I have learned and experienced. Many of us who make this transition were high performers in leading schools; however, being a consultant or school improvement specialist is somewhat different than being a school leader. In an underperforming school, it is likely that those who work in the school have seen many people come and go who were attempting to help. Also, if you do not have direct authority over the people working in the school, you have to influence the improvements, not order them to be implemented. In order to support the types of changes needed to improve the performance of a school like the one you are assigned to help, it is important to get them to focus on the facts and guide them in identifying the gap between where they are and where they could be, all while building trust and good relationships. What I learned was that although all schools have similarities, all also have unique contexts that impact their performance and the achievement of their students."

"Don't make the mistake I made in the beginning of my transition." Frank cautioned. "I thought that because I had turned around the school I led, I knew

12 • The School Improvement Specialist Field Guide

how to fix the first school I was assigned to help. I soon learned to study all the data and information and develop some hypotheses based on my experience and existing research before engaging the people in the school. I had to take time to listen, observe, and learn with them to truly get a clear picture of the state of the school. I have learned quite a bit over the past five years. Upon reflection, I have realized that what made me effective in leading improvement of my own school was that I was a collaborative leader and facilitated change, rather than ordering compliance. Both as a leader and a consultant assigned to a school, I had to take the time to identify the unique challenges and strengths within the school before recommending changes.”

“Recently, I earned the Certified School Improvement Specialist job certification. I did that by documenting my work in facilitating school improvement and the results. During the application process, I did a great deal of reflection on the craft of facilitation of school improvement, and I developed a network of people who were pursuing their certification who I can now reach out to for advice when I have a challenge or want to share something I am working on and get ideas from others. If you would like, I will be happy to connect you with that network. You are going to be very successful, and I know you will really enjoy the work ahead. Feel free to call me anytime.”

Story to be continued . . .

In your role as a school improvement specialist, the focus is always on others—those you are guiding and the students they serve. However, as you make your journey through this book, you are invited to enjoy a rare professional experience—focusing on *you*. Whether you are a leader in a school or an external expert charged with improving and transforming schools to support student success, you spend your time focused on helping, teaching, guiding, and supporting others. This book is about you, your craft of facilitating improvement, and your success. School improvement is a collaborative effort, where the focus is on the students, faculty, staff, administrators, and other stakeholders but never on you. This book is intended to allow you to reflect, learn, and focus on becoming more effective so that you can succeed in helping those you guide and support to be more successful.

This book will also help you compare your day-to-day efforts, performance, and results to the Certified School Improvement Specialist (CSIS) standards; however, it is intended to support you in increasing your skills and knowledge and your appreciation of the unique and valuable role you play in schools independent of whether you choose to pursue certification. Enjoy this opportunity to focus and reflect on *you!*

STANDARD 1: ANALYZE AND APPLY CRITICAL JUDGMENT

The first CSIS standard, *Analyze and Apply Critical Judgment*, reflects the work you must do in preparation to guide and engage others in systemic improvement efforts. The work begins with the collection and study of the data and artifacts that provide insight into the systemic factors impacting school and student performance. This analysis and critical review prepares you to identify and address the barriers in the work and workplace that may impede the adoption of new behaviors and improved practices and establish a culture that is enduring and supports success for all. Just as Bailey Pittman was about to experience a role transition, you have made this change or will experience it. How you manage your entrance into the organization or group you will facilitate and the analysis and thinking you apply initially will play a large part in your ability to support the needed changes in a school.

If you have been appointed to serve as a school improvement specialist or have inherited the role (possibly along with other responsibilities), it is important to realize that you are a performance consultant, someone who is

- an expert in performance analysis and measurement, who facilitates sustainable improvement, typically without authority over the individuals he or she is guiding.
- able to facilitate those who work in the organization to take responsibility for improving performance.
- unbiased and not predisposed toward a particular solution, using data to guide recommendations and decisions.
- skilled in guiding conversations that keep those who work in the organization engaged and focused on improvement, meaningful outcomes, and results.

Your job is a blend of the role of expert and facilitator. You are performing your job because someone assumes you are an expert, with knowledge from past practice in improving school performance, someone who has the skills needed to advise and guide others to improve and the facilitation skills to guide group processes, manage group dynamics, and support the change process. You are expected to bring the interpersonal skills and the abilities needed to bring people to consensus, to manage conflict, and to simultaneously provide pressure and support with a level of neutrality that reflects fairness and a belief that improvement is both possible and required.

You are expected to bring the interpersonal skills and the abilities needed to bring people to consensus, to manage conflict, and to simultaneously provide pressure and support with a level of neutrality that reflects fairness and a belief that improvement is both possible and required.

Facilitating the Collection and Interpretation of Data

The focus of the first element of Standard 1 is on how you should immerse yourself in performance data to understand the unique issues and strengths within the school before engaging others in the improvement process.

- 1.1 Facilitate the collection, analysis, validation, and interpretation of quantitative and qualitative data regarding the multiple factors impacting student, teacher, leader, and school performance.

Understanding the data yourself will ensure that you are prepared to help others appropriately use the data they already have, question the relevance and utility of the data to support improvement, validate the data to confirm they accurately reflect what is intended, and interpret the meaning or implications of the data. You must collect and study both qualitative and quantitative data. *Qualitative* data are perceptions and attributes that may be ordered by source or impact. *Quantitative* data are numbers and measurements. Qualitative data are sometimes referred to as *soft data* and quantitative data as *hard data*; however, what makes data soft is that the perceptions are not independently verifiable (Guerra-Lopez, 2008). Similarly, what makes data hard is not that it is made up of numbers and measures but that it is verifiable through external sources (Kaufman, Guerra, & Platt, 2006).

This analysis and critical review allows you to

- develop an understanding of the systemic, “as-is” state of the performance of the school, administrators, teachers, staff, and students.
- identify the barriers in the work, workers, and workplace that are limiting improvement as well as the strengths to be leveraged.
- determine the gap between current behaviors, capacity, practices, and results and those that are expected, required, and valued.
- scan the culture and identify the underlying assumptions and beliefs that are limiting improvement as well as those that can be leveraged to support improvement and transformative change.

- prepare to engage administrators and others who will be coached to lead the change process by facilitating collection and analysis and then clearly identifying the needs and opportunities so that understanding and ownership can be established over time.
- assess your own biases and begin the process of establishing credibility.

To be an effective school improvement specialist, you must focus on outcomes and measurable results and display working knowledge of data collection, analysis, and measurement in schools, including the various types of data that

- are readily available in schools and school districts.
- will require additional effort, tools, and processes to collect.
- will support the study of causal relationships and leading or predictive indicators of performance.
- give insight into the processes and performance factors that impact student achievement.

The collection and analysis of data usually begins with reviewing the data that are publicly available from state or national testing organizations and annual reports and then analyzing that data against any existing school improvement plans. You want to become familiar with the data that those who work in the school or school district can or should be able to see. Your focus will also be on determining if a school's plans correctly reflect its performance improvement needs.

This review of multiple types of qualitative and quantitative data includes existing data in a few categories, such as student achievement, demographics, perceptions and engagement, and process data. Figure 1.1, though not exhaustive, suggests types of data in each category.

Figure 1.1 Examples of Data

Student Achievement Data:

- Overall summative school achievement data such as state test data; graduation rates; student grade-to-grade, school-to-school, and ability level promotion rates; SAT test scores; college progression; career readiness; or value-added measures of learning, which indicate if a student is achieving a full year of learning for a full year of instruction

(Continued)

Figure 1.1 (Continued)

- Disaggregated summative student achievement, organized by student groups
- Multiple assessments—interim assessments, such as weekly tests against the standards of the curriculum taught; formative assessments (also known as *assessments for learning*), such as writing assignments that indicate which standards a student has mastered to date to determine if the instructional interventions are working; and summative assessments, which reflect the levels of learning achieved after a course of instruction is completed
- Similar schools' performance compared to this school's performance
- Review of student work against standards

Demographic Data:

- School demographic data
- Community demographic data

Perception and Engagement Data:

- Student attendance
- Student engagement
- Parent/family engagement
- Teacher attendance
- Teacher engagement
- Other external stakeholder engagement
- Partner engagement

Process Data:

- Professional learning
- Teacher, staff, and administrator performance data
- Student behavior data, such as student discipline referrals
- Talent, such as the degrees held by teachers relative to their teaching assignments
- Nutrition, such as students' access to protein-rich foods early in the day
- Financial management, such as forecasting and tracking budgets and expenses
- Maintenance, such as preventative care and life cycle analysis of equipment
- Transportation, such as optimizing bus stops to reduce fuel costs and increase safety

- Scheduling, such as providing common planning time for teams of teachers across the curriculum
 - Instructional technology, such as the use of electronic portable devices to collect student responses in classrooms
 - Management technology, such as staff and parent information portals or security and attendance systems
 - Special education, such as the quality of inclusion co-teaching
 - Student support services, such as alignment of after-school programs with community resources
 - Observations in standards-based classrooms
 - Alignment of curriculum, classroom instruction, and assessments.
 - Quality of student assignments compared to 21st-century skills and curriculum standards
 - The degree of focus on reading and writing instruction across the curriculum
 - Horizontal and vertical alignment of processes and practices—school-to-school, grade-to-grade, class-to-class
 - Dual secondary and university enrollments, advanced placement, International Baccalaureate, career and technical participation, acceleration programs, credit recovery, internships, work-based learning
-

Once you have identified the sources and types of data to be analyzed, the *Guidelines for Analyzing Data* (Tool 1.1) provide questions you can use to analyze the data initially available to you. A great deal of data exists for every school. Once you have collected it, it may help to group the data by purpose or intent so you can identify themes and corroborating examples.

From the initial analysis, you will have to determine whether additional data will be needed to facilitate teachers, administrators, and principals in recognizing the need to improve performance and to take responsibility for that improvement. By using the early phase of data collection and analysis to understand needs and gaps, you demonstrate to school personnel that you are focusing on results and outcomes and you set the tone for engaging them in getting the facts, measuring their own results, and strategically planning for improved performance. By demonstrating that you are looking for data and performance factors that are wider and deeper than just state or national test scores, you can help facilitate understanding that school improvement is complex work that requires an aligned suite of systemic solutions to produce real and sustainable improvement. Figure 1.2 illustrates the process of moving from working with available data to collecting additional data required to identify the gaps in the processes that support improvement and that guide prioritization.

Tool 1.1 Guidelines for Analyzing the Data

Guidelines: Use the following set of questions to help you reflect on the data you have available and how to best use that data as you move forward.

1. What does each particular data set measure?
2. Do the data reflect a particular point in time or an accumulation of points over time?
3. How do the data within a set support or refute each other?
4. What other data exist that might add clarity?
5. Where might you get data to verify your initial conclusions?

Next, to better understand the data, ask:

6. Have the data changed? Is there a trend?
7. What are the implications if future data demonstrate a continuation of the trend?
8. What other data exist that may give insight to what is contributing to the results you are seeing?

Figure 1.2 Collecting and Analyzing Data

Collection and Analysis of Available Achievement, Demographic, Perception, and Process Data



Areas of Need Identified



Collection and Analysis of Data Not Captured or Tracked By Available Systems or More Specific Data Required to Determine and Prioritize Needs

The focus on inquiry and data centers the attention on the discovery of facts rather than assumptions. Whether or not you have been directly responsible for past performance of the school, you might have assumptions about what causes poor performance based on your experience in other schools or organizations. Warning! The tools and techniques in this field guide are meant to help you facilitate change and improvement and apply and validate the expertise you can effectively bring to bear, but it is critical that you work from facts and data rather than intuition or assumptions.

Warning! The tools and techniques in this field guide are meant to help you facilitate change and improvement and apply and validate the expertise you can effectively bring to bear, but it is critical that you work from facts and data rather than intuition or assumptions.

Combining analysis with critical judgment before engaging those you will guide will help you avoid the trap of jumping to solutions before entirely understanding the gap between where the school is and where it needs to be and why that gap exists. Reviewing the data that are publically available about a school only provides a partial view into the factors impacting performance and results in a school or school district. You will want to collect additional data before forming your own hypotheses.

Your inquiry must reflect a lack of bias and a willingness to deeply and truly understand what is going on in the school and what is impacting the *work* (teaching and learning), the *workers* (students, faculty, support staff, administrators, instructional coaches, paraprofessionals, and other stakeholders), and the *workplace* (the places where the work of teaching and learning is situated, including within the community and the student's family). For example, independent initial analysis of data followed by effective questioning techniques can produce additional information as well as build trust and acceptance by those you are questioning and will later engage in the improvement process. You must also pay close attention to the interpersonal and political factors at play, choosing carefully who you interview and in what order, so that the leaders of the school, teachers, and support staff perceive that you are honoring their roles, authority, and points of view.

No matter what your past experiences in school improvement may have been or your impressions of the school or what you have read and studied about schools, the school you are supporting has a unique context, with multiple and unique performance factors. Your first and primary task is to set aside assumptions, hunches, and opinions and study the school and its performance in an unbiased fashion. You must be willing and able to pursue a systematic inquiry process to determine what is contributing to school performance and what is impeding it. Your job is not to *assume* what is happening, why it is happening, and how to fix it but to *find out* what, why, and how it is happening before attempting to propose solutions or take action. Using data and seeking facts shows that you are setting assumptions aside and prepares those you will guide to later accept your expert opinions because you have established yourself as a neutral performance investigator.

20 • The School Improvement Specialist Field Guide

By focusing on multiple types of data, you will demonstrate that you understand that student performance is impacted by a host of internal and external factors. The state of an underperforming school is what cognitive experts term an *ill-structured problem*. Ill-defined or ill-structured problems are “those that we encounter in everyday life, in which one or several aspects of the situation are not well specified, the goals are unclear, and there is insufficient information to solve them” (Ge & Land, 2004, p. 5).

Being an effective school improvement specialist requires showing that you bring with you a disciplined approach and body of practice to study and address the ill-structured problem of an underperforming school. You must demonstrate your intention and expertise to assess performance; identify performance factors; select, recommend, and evaluate the right interventions; and facilitate the collection of process and performance data to evaluate the effectiveness of interventions. Finally, you must demonstrate that you can facilitate others to implement interventions with fidelity and adopt new behaviors. The starting point for establishing yourself as a credible expert begins with the work of collecting data and facts and seeking first to understand those data and facts in a manner that leads others to become willing to understand these data, accept that changes are needed, and respond favorably to you in your performance consulting role.

Dr. Georgia Evans is a highly effective CSIS who has supported the turnaround and systemic, ongoing improvement of many schools in varied contexts. She stresses the importance of questioning and collecting data and information using methods that build engagement, help those who lead and work in the school avoid embarrassment, eliminate blaming, and increase the odds that she will be able to facilitate improvement.

I thoroughly review all the publically available data on schools I am assigned to support in advance of my first visit. I want to have as much understanding of the current state of performance as possible, but I never walk in with a preformed opinion of the school’s needs or a plan. My initial review of data before entering the school or school district simply helps me know all I can before I learn the rest of what I need to know to facilitate those doing the work of schooling to make improvements. The analysis process is like putting a puzzle together. I know I only have some of the pieces of the puzzle when I arrive at the school for the first time. I have seen many improvement consultants and school leaders who limit their effectiveness in facilitating sustainable improvement, because they arrive with a plan, with solutions they think are needed, and

with strong opinions. Doing this role well requires paying close attention to *how* I perform the initial inquiry and study.

My questioning process helps me find missing pieces of the performance puzzle, which can only be obtained by methodical questioning in an order that respects the leadership, teachers, and all who impact student success. (G. Evans, personal communication, August 10, 2011)

After her initial independent review of the school's data, Evans uses an interview protocol that follows a structured process as shown in the *Initial Inquiry Worksheet* (Tool 1.2). She typically begins by talking with supervisors of the school, then moves on to the lead principal or headmaster, and gradually connects with the entire leadership team, including assistant principals, instructional coaches, groups of teachers, counselors, and other support staff. She records their answers and uses her initial independent inquiry to compare the perceptions of those she interviews to what she has identified in her preliminary work as strengths, needs, and evidence.

I ask everyone the same questions—[including] students who are old enough to provide answers—and then compile and analyze their answers. After each interview, I compare their answers to their school improvement initiatives. I want to know if the needs shared with me are the same as those in their school improvement plans and if they are aligned. My goal is to not only understand what they see as strengths and improvement needs, but to let them see that I am both truly interested in their perspectives and committed to validating and corroborating their points of view. Later, I will lead them to dig deeper into the data and evidence, because I will need to help each person and group understand the rationale behind [the] needed changes. (G. Evans, personal communication, August 10, 2011)

Once you have completed your interviews, you can compile areas of strength and improvement using a *Plus-Delta Chart*, as shown in Tool 1.3.

Evans next conducts classroom observations and uses checklists to turn her observations into quantitative data, such as the number of classrooms she visited that were using differentiated instruction or the number of teachers who were using instructional practices aligned to the performance or curriculum standards for their teaching content. Evans emphasizes the primacy of improvement specialists' knowledge of the core business of schools, teaching, and learning as a part of their body of expertise:

Tool 1.2 Initial Inquiry Worksheet

Guidelines: This worksheet is meant for you to modify to meet your own needs. It can help you discover the group’s beliefs about the school and what they are using as evidence to support their beliefs.

Site: _____ Interviewee/Group: _____

Title/role: _____ Contact: _____

<i>What do you believe are the strengths of this school (or school district)?</i>	<i>Why do you think these strengths exist?</i>	<i>What data or evidence can you point to that proves that?</i>
<i>What do you think are the areas in need of improvement that currently exist?</i>	<i>Why do you think these areas in need of improvement exist?</i>	<i>What data or evidence can you point to that proves that?</i>

Tool 1.3 Plus-Delta Chart

Guidelines: This is a chart you will want to build on as you continue your work with the school. It is not intended to be a onetime activity, but one that encourages everyone to record their new insights as they continue down the journey of school improvement.

<i>+ 's = Areas of Strength</i>	<i>Δ's = Areas of Improvement</i>

A capable school improvement specialist must have expert knowledge of effective curriculum, instruction, and assessment standards to be able to observe classroom performance and translate what is seen and heard into data that can support the improvement process. (G. Evans, personal communication, August 10, 2011)

Demonstrating Deep Knowledge

Evans' belief in the necessity of expert thinking is supported by the second element of Standard 1:

- 1.2 Demonstrate deep knowledge of the work of school improvement and transformation and the underlying research and best practices, particularly in improving curriculum, instruction, assessment, and facilitating solutions and breakthroughs.

This element focuses on your expertise in the core work of schools—providing the right curriculum, instruction, and assessment—as well as your expertise in taking a disciplined approach to assessing and guiding the effectiveness of the work performed. Your expertise must include the ability to focus upon factors in the school and its environment that are unrelated to the core work but that impact teaching and learning. Schools are affected by their place within a system of schools and their community as well as what is taking place in the state, the region, the nation, and the world. Your expertise in the delivery of curriculum, instruction, assessment, and student support amid a powerful confluence of changing social, political, economic, demographic, and technological factors is essential.

The nature of the work of school improvement, driven by the moral imperative to help all students succeed, as well as local, state, and national mandates place you in the best of all and the worst of all situations: You are there to help, guide, coach, and support others as they accept responsibility, change, and improve; and you are there to point out and bring the organization to address what is missing or not working and who is not performing to required and expected levels. Reform mandates may have landed you in the unenviable position of being “from the district office/state/government/outside and here to help.” Persistently underperforming schools have seen folks arrive and depart before and have managed to intentionally or unintentionally resist change.

In addition to your role as facilitator, aiding and supporting those within the school to understand the gaps and needs and to assume ownership and accountability for results, your role requires proficiency in several expert areas:

1. Researcher: Identify, develop, or test data and information and translate its implications for improved performance.
2. Guide in Research-Based Practices: Illustrate and assist in understanding and adopting practices with fidelity that have produced improvement in schools with similar contexts and performance factors.
3. Compliance Analyst: Identify and document gaps in performance which result in the organization being out of compliance with local, state, provincial, or national laws, rules, and regulations.

24 • The School Improvement Specialist Field Guide

4. Needs Analyst: Identify ideal and existing performance, conditions, and causes.
5. Trainer: Teach those who work in the school to perform their work to the required performance standards and encourage them to develop capability, which will allow them to be successful when you are no longer working with them.
6. Subject Matter Expert: Draw on professional knowledge, skills, resources, and expertise.
7. Coach: Support on-the-job practices, provide clear performance criteria and feedback on performance, devote time to others' performance needs, focus attention and resources on their behalf, support problem solving and other skills necessary for others to achieve optimal performance.

Becoming an effective school improvement specialist requires fluency in the multiple roles that establish your expertise and opens others' minds to valuing your points of view and practices. Most important, to establish expert value in the minds of others, they must perceive you as contributing value that they cannot produce on their own. If they believe they already know what you know, can do what you do, have access to the same resources as you, and have the time and level of attention to needs and solutions that you bring, they cannot and will not value your contributions as an expert, facilitator, or consultant. Being recognized as a valued, credible expert means establishing a gap in their perception between what they bring to the table and what you can bring, so they feel they need your help and are willing to go with you on the journey of improvement. In later chapters, we will explore other methods for building credibility, in addition to establishing value as a school improvement expert and effective performance consultant.

Dr. Evans points to the need for teachers and administrators to see that as an observer and facilitator of performance, you have the same or a deeper knowledge of the system of teaching and learning and are not guided by a narrow research base.

I have learned that it is essential to know the research concerning teaching and learning, but I know I must be careful how I reference research. During teachers' preparation, they may have encountered professors who focus deeply on a single area of research, and the teachers may perceive those professors as biased

by their narrow academic focus, causing teachers to question the value of academic research in the complex real world of schools. I usually don't talk about research-based best practices until after my initial data collection from classroom observations so that practice and academic research are informing both our discovery and interpretation.

I am careful to always leave at least a brief thank you note on the door of every teacher I observe and note at least one good research-based practice I saw. I want them to know that I know what good instruction looks like and that I am seeking to learn and understand, not to tell them what they are doing wrong or should do. I work to identify the capacity and capability of every adult in the school, and later, I use this information as I facilitate groups working together, drawing on each individual's strengths. This is part of the "gathering of the puzzle pieces," and I know [at this point] it is too soon to make recommendations.

I let my knowledge of research and my experience inform my inquiry at the initial stages. Next, I use it to inform my critical judgment about what to present to the group to bring the school team along with me on the improvement journey. (G. Evans, personal communication, August 10, 2011)

Presenting Evidence That Supports Conclusions

The last element of Standard 1 focuses on the way that you communicate what you and others have discovered so that the expertise you bring to bear is valued, your intentions are viewed as honorable and trustworthy, and you are established as an effective guide toward what is needed, possible, and required.

- 1.3 Present evidence so that conclusions and solutions are supported and so that others have a clear model to follow.

You have choices about how you present the data and your findings so others will accept your intentions and ask for your help. Whatever approach you choose, you want others to recognize the implications, ask better questions than they would have without data to inform their inquiry, and be willing to discuss potential actions that will improve student and school performance. For example, when presenting the data, consider commenting aloud what questions the data raised for you,

how the data made you wonder about what the contributing factors were, and what data might corroborate your initial suspicions.

Evans follows a protocol for presenting what she has found that helps her to demonstrate her willingness to listen and understand while guiding the focus toward improvement needs that her audience will later agree to own. She stresses making sure the principal or headmaster has the first opportunity to review the findings and has a choice to review it first or to engage others:

I begin with the principal or headmaster by saying, “I have collected some data and have some observations. I would like to share them with you and anyone else you would like in the first conversation. I will eventually need to share this with all the school team and your supervisor, but I want to meet with everyone on a schedule that you choose between now and our deadline for the initial inquiry phase. If you are ready to begin that process, how would you like to proceed?” (G. Evans, personal communication, August 10, 2011)

By giving school leaders a choice regarding who first reviews the initial findings, you help the leader trust your intentions and you position the leader as a part of the team working on the improvement, which you are assigned to facilitate. If you are required to share the findings first with his or her supervisor, make sure the principal or headmaster knows this is not within your control and that you are committed to his or her success. Stress that school improvement is owned by a school team and its supervisors and support staff, not just the school’s leader or leadership team.

The presentation of evidence and data need not be complex; however, sometimes data are best presented formally, as in a report or through graphics. Other times, data are best presented informally or offered in a spontaneous fashion, for example, by putting them on a white board or flipchart paper. In both cases, data have more meaning if they are combined with corroborating data. Where possible, put data in sequence to show a trend. Support the data with other information that illustrates changes or other dynamics.

Your goals at the beginning of a school improvement initiative are to create understanding for both yourself and the school team and supervisors and to create engagement that will support needed changes. Later, you will dig deeper to find root causes and, eventually, solutions. How you present the data and engage the client initially is critical to gaining trust, demonstrating your good intentions, and helping others believe you can help them “get there” and be successful.

Your data presentation must reinforce the points you need to make and convince the client of the benefit of working toward improvement.

Most important, you must help others see that change will happen and that they will be part of the success story.

Because your goal is engagement, presenting initial data is only a prelude to the actual collection of data and information that can point to possible solutions. Those who work in the school must be engaged in the study of data and must learn how to access and use data to achieve and sustain improvement. Handing teachers and administrators their data and analyzing it for them is not as likely to engage them in improvement efforts as giving them enough data to challenge their assumptions and convince them to dig deeper.

Teachers and school administrators, like all adult workers, must understand the rationale behind what they are expected to do and achieve. As you are presenting your findings, build a case for why things must change and improve by helping your audiences see the gap between what is and what can be and between what they think the current levels of performance are and what they actually are.

Evans describes a simple tool, the *Assumptions Worksheet* in Tool 1.4, which she uses during and after her presentation of findings to achieve agreement in the need to change.

I post a large sheet of paper that has a grid showing the highest scores, state average scores, and lowest scores. Next, I set out self-stick notes or colored stickers and ask them to individually mark on the paper their answers to the question, “Where do you think our school *could be* in comparison to the state average—below, at, or above?” If I think it will help, I will sometimes show how the school or district demographics compare with the state’s demographics; for example, I might say, “Our school population is 23 percent Hispanic compared to 26 percent of the state population. The meet and exceed percents for our Hispanic/Latino students in 4th grade math is 57 percent compared to 78 percent of Hispanic students at the state level.”

Once we have completed the marked sheet, we use it to discuss their expectations as compared with what the data say about the school’s actual position. For example, if the school is below the state in math performance and they believe it should be above the state, then it is easier for them to agree something needs to change.

The rationale I use is that educators want their students to do well relative to their peers in other places. So far, I have never seen any group of educators go through this exercise and agree they do not want their students to exceed the average. I know that our goal is to help every student succeed at high levels, so the exercise is not about setting an exact performance target but about agreeing that improvement is needed and that we want our students to be the best.

This challenges apathy, excuses, and the status quo. Even in areas where students exceed the state average, I ask, “Do you want your students to do better than they are doing and if so, how well?” Later we can investigate why students are performing as they are, using data and evidence. My goal is to get everyone in agreement that change and improvement are needed and to influence them to let me facilitate them through the change and improvement process. I also use this process to compare student graduation, college enrollment rates, and performance on national tests such as the SAT and ACT. (G. Evans, personal communication, August 10, 2011)

Tool 1.4 Assumptions Worksheet

Guidelines: This tool is designed to help you elicit the group’s assumptions about the school in terms of how it compares to other schools in the district, state, or nation. You may edit this worksheet to reflect the entities against which you are comparing your school.

Consider where you think your school/district should be in comparison to the state. Place a mark on the chart indicating where you would place your school/district.

Highest Scores in State

State Average on _____ (whatever test or performance data you are analyzing)

Lowest Scores in State

Reflection questions:

1. Based on the group’s response to the chart, what observations can we make?
2. How can this information help guide our discussion of test data?
3. How do you think the rest of the school would respond to this same exercise?

Another useful tool, the *Demographic Comparison Chart* (as shown in Tool 1.5), helps you prepare to guide the group to come to their own

conclusions about the need for change and improvement. Adapt this chart to reflect the student subgroups within the school or schools you are supporting.

Tool 1.5 Demographic Comparison Chart

Guidelines: Use or edit this tool to reflect the demographic factors relevant to your school to help the group find out how their school's performance compares to other schools.

Review the demographic data below.

1. What is the performance of each subgroup?
2. Where do you think we should be?
3. How can understanding our demographics guide us in our efforts to improve our overall performance?

<i>Demographics</i>	<i>Our School</i>	<i>State Averages</i>
White		
African American		
Hispanic/Latino		
Native American		
Asian/Pacific Islander		
Multiracial/Other		
Students with Disabilities		
English Language Learners		
Gifted		
Free- and Reduced-Lunch Qualified		

Similarly, the *Performance Comparison Chart*, shown in Tool 1.6, can be used to illustrate the school's performance in academic areas as compared to the state or other standards. Use the chart to both communicate what the data say and what others believe is possible. Your goal is to get commitment to change, not to assign blame.

While Standard 1 represents the work that is performed at the initial stages of inquiry in a school improvement initiative, the work is iterative and recursive in nature. The performance consultant leading school improvement uses the three elements of Standard 1 throughout the improvement cycle to

Tool 1.6 Performance Comparison Chart

Guidelines: Use or edit this tool to compare a specific school's performance by subject area to the state's averages.

<i>Subject and Grade Level</i>	<i>Our School</i>	<i>State Averages</i>
English and Language Arts		
Math		
Science		
Social Studies		

- facilitate the collection and study of data so that the right conclusions can be reached to inform judgments and decisions.
- create awareness and knowledge of the gap between current performance and the expected results so that the right suites of solutions can be designed later.
- ensure that people are willing to plan and make needed changes and improvements as well as own the outcomes and results.

AN EXAMPLE OF AN EFFECTIVE APPLICATION OF STANDARD 1

Sally Torrez was assigned to improve the reading performance of students in Grades 7 and 8. She studied the annual test results to determine disaggregated groups of students' current level of performance and their results on interim reading assessments. She observed teachers during their reading instruction and during instruction in other content areas, such as earth science, to see how teachers are teaching reading across the curriculum of the school. She met with the principal to determine what he thinks is working in reading instruction and what could be better. She asked for evidence to support his opinions. She recorded the responses and repeated the interview process with the entire school leadership team, including the instructional coaches who were assigned to develop teachers' teaching skills and groups of teachers by grade level. She compared the responses to the school improvement plan's areas of focus. She reviewed the professional learning records and professional degrees of each teacher (relative to teaching reading). She developed a set of data to represent her findings

and observations. Torrez had some hunches about what was happening in the school and how to improve reading, but she decided to let the data tell the story so that those she interviewed and others in the school could first see the self-identified gaps in performance and could agree that the data and observations were valid before beginning to diagnose why the gaps existed or how to close them.

During her inquiry, Torrez studied the Lexile scores of students on reading tests after the first two weeks of school. Since Lexile scores provide a common scale for measuring text difficulty and student reading ability, she knew that reviewing students' data was critical to helping both the teachers who were teaching reading and those teaching other content to inform instructional strategies. She knew that reading must be taught in every classroom and that research pointed to specific interventions that needed to be in place to support reading across the curriculum as well as processes that teachers and instructional coaches could use to determine how well the methods they are trying to help students learn to read well is working. However, her observations led her to believe that teachers in content areas outside language arts were not using the research-based practices that could ensure students were reading at or above the Lexile levels for the texts and supplemental materials used in their classrooms. She also observed that all teachers were not effectively studying whether the interventions they were using with struggling readers were working on a student-by-student basis. However, in each classroom she observed, she both thanked the teacher for allowing her to observe and pointed out any of the appropriate reading instructional practices she saw.

Torrez thought she knew what it would take to bring adoption of research-based reading interventions to scale in both the targeted reading instruction and general classroom instruction; however, she knew that first she had to help teachers see the difference between how their students were performing in reading and how they could be performing and between how they were teaching and how they could be teaching and how well they were assessing students' responses to reading interventions.

She prepared an activity to conduct with teachers, instructional coaches, and administrators to share the data she had collected and engage them in discerning and rating the existing gaps in student and teacher performance.

After Torrez collected the data and constructed an activity to allow teachers, instructional coaches, and administrators to see

the current and desired state of reading performance, she called the school principal. “I have done some inquiry in the 7th and 8th grade students’ reading performance as well as the reading teaching practices we are using in reading instruction, including in general classrooms. I have some data to share and some observations I have made. Would you like me to share this with you first or with a group you select before I conduct an activity to share it with all the teachers? How would you like to proceed? I want to make sure I am on target with what I think and what others see is happening before we begin to work together to find some solutions.”

The principal asked her to brief him, the leadership team, and the special education director on the data and observations. She opened the meeting by assuring the group that she was committed to making them successful in leading improvement of reading and that she was optimistic that the faculty could improve the reading performance of all students, including those who were struggling. Following her presentation, she said to the group, “These are just initial findings based on study of the data, observations, and interviews. Am I on track? I want to make sure I have your input before I share this with the faculty, and of course, I will be seeking their feedback when I present it. It is critical that, together, we help everyone understand that the whole school and its support systems are responsible and able to improve the reading of all the students here.”

AN EXAMPLE OF A LESS EFFECTIVE APPLICATION OF STANDARD 1

Xavier Richardson was assigned as a performance coach to improve reading in Grades 7 and 8. He was confident that he could improve reading performance, given his experience teaching reading and his broad and deep research of best practices for improving reading. As he studied the annual reading test scores of students and the initial reading assessment in both grades at the start of the year, he saw both groups of students and individual students who were not reading at Lexile levels appropriate to their age and grade level. He developed a detailed spreadsheet of the student data and analyzed it to determine the students who were underperforming, on track, and performing very well in their reading assessments. Next, he developed a plan for improving their reading performance and asked the principal to allow him to present it at the next faculty meeting.

After Richardson presented the data at the faculty meeting, he said to the group, “I have been fortunate to have been working for several years in teaching and researching practices in improving students’ reading performance. Clearly, this school has room for improvement, and I have some practices that I will be helping you adopt to improve students’ reading performance. I am now going to review those practices with you so that you will know what the best practices are and what I will be looking for in your classrooms and as you work together. For those of you who teach in content areas that typically do not teach students to read or improve reading, I can show you how to fix this so that all students read at high levels.” Richardson then gave a presentation on the practices research had found to be most effective in improving reading. At the conclusion, he said, “I hope all of you now know what I will be looking for as I observe your classrooms over the next couple of weeks. Now I am going to give each of you a schedule for when I will be observing your classroom, and I will write a prescription for each of you concerning practices you should adopt, based on what research says. Do you have any questions?”

Following his observation in each classroom, Richardson developed a set of recommendations for each grade level of what needed to be done to improve reading at each grade level and presented it to the principal along with recommendations to adopt a reading program that he knew was grounded in research-based reading improvement practices. He volunteered to help the principal assist teachers in the adoption of the program and to introduce it along with a summary of the gaps he found in teaching performance at the next faculty meeting.

REFLECTION

1. Compare and contrast what Torrez and Richardson did in their improvement efforts.
2. What did Torrez do that made a positive difference?
3. In your opinion, what could prevent Richardson from making progress with the school team?
4. What in this chapter will be useful to you in your practice of facilitating improvement?

POWER POINTS

Each chapter will include tips, techniques, and guidelines about how to gain and sustain your fluency in facilitating school improvement and help schools transform to meet 21st-century demands. Here are some points based on this chapter:

- Make it a habit to check out the latest research about the factors that support or impede performance, why certain interventions are effective, and what has to be in place for them to be effective. To find useful data, periodically visit the websites of the latest publications and do searches for new ideas and findings that will reinforce your position as an expert. As you begin this work, remember that not everyone values data the same way. Some people make it a point to discount the evidence because it does not support their ideas about what the problem is or their recommended solution. Remember that data without analyses rarely support valid conclusions. Also remember that even though qualitative data measure opinions, they are still valid if there are corroborating data. Opinions matter. All data are just points in time; by themselves, they do not predict or support conclusions.
- Sometimes people may be overwhelmed and need time to digest the initial findings and observations or they may miss arriving at the conclusions that certain changes are needed. If you sense they are not realizing the implications of the findings or are reticent to commit to needed changes, you may say, “It looks like you need some time to study and think about this.” Let them know you will be back in touch by a specific date. If you have committed to report to their supervisor, let them know that you must do this and that you would like to have some conclusions agreed upon as soon as possible so that next steps can be planned, and you can report this progress.
- Coming in as a know-it-all or touting your expertise can trigger defensiveness in the people you are assigned to help. It is important to communicate through what you say and do that you are there to listen to and truly hear what they think and feel.
- Go in prepared. Analyze the available performance data in advance, but do not say, “I have seen your data.”
- Smile; reinforce that you are there to learn and understand and are not playing “got you” or seeking to place blame.

SUMMARY

The work of Standard 1 is performed both at the beginning of facilitating a school improvement cycle and along the way as more data are collected and analyzed, meaning is created, and conclusions are drawn that impact decisions and actions. Meeting this standard requires expert knowledge of how to access, collect, and use the multiple types of data that must be studied to improve the complex systems of work that impact teaching and student learning and performance. While being a respected and effective performance consultant or school leader requires expert knowledge in the systems of teaching and learning and knowledge of how to determine which high-leverage research-based practices might be applied, it also requires you to play several roles. A key role is that of a facilitator, who knows when and how to interpret and present information, elicit others' reactions, call for commitment, and create and maintain a persona of openness and fairness. The following chapters continue with explanations, tools, and examples of the other standards.

See the end of this book for a complete list of resources and references related to data analyses.



Additional materials and resources related to
The School Improvement Specialist Field Guide
can be found on the companion website.
<http://www.corwin.com/sisguide>