

The Excitement and Challenge of Beginning a New School Year

A year ago at this important time of the school year, we published an E-Hint including checklists for starting the school year with immediate curriculum, instruction, and assessment needs at the forefront. This E-Hint is still relevant for kick-starting these efforts for the new year: [Checklists to Begin the School Year](#).

Reviewing the status of ongoing initiatives and planning for the current year should become routine. In the years following the development of curriculum documents, the implementation of curriculum, and the writing of assessments, there are often other initiatives that must come into play to further improve student learning. While we at Curriculum Leadership Institute (CLI), caution school districts about starting too many initiatives at once, there is a time and place where outside support for improving instructional strategies, improving the implementation of a new resource, using data analysis strategies to effectively critique our efforts, or other needs must be addressed.

With the beginning of a new school year on the horizon, evaluate decisions about when to start new initiatives, who will be affected by the change, and the intended result. While examining time-allocation for any new initiative, planners should consider the impact on the staff. Administrators must be very careful to ensure a plan that does not

overload any particular staff member, or group of staff members, to the point of limiting their effectiveness in the classroom. Teachers will continue to have all of the responsibilities of everyday management of the classroom. When the district starts something new, it necessarily impacts and potentially increases the amount of time needed for managing the classroom. Whether the new initiative requires study time, learning a new instructional strategy, finding better methods of accomplishing the same teacher tasks, learning new software programs, or implementing a new schoolwide effort, teachers must continue to do all that they have been doing in addition to anything new. Providing time for teachers to learn, discuss, and evaluate effectiveness of new strategies is critical to ensure fidelity to the effort. *When* that time is provided, it makes all the difference. The new initiative needs to be added to the checklist of the ongoing tasks, in detail, so that the potential impact on staff members is clear to all involved.

A visual display, such as a spreadsheet that can be color coded or sorted by various attributes such as teachers, time of year, related efforts, etc., helps planners “see” when the same teachers are impacted repeatedly in a short time span. Visuals help call attention to “pink flag cases” where instruction may be so significantly impacted that the benefit of the work or training time

becomes questionable. In order to make the visual display most helpful, include the type of training, the teachers impacted, other efforts that are closely related to each training or work session, and the recommended time of the school year for the training. Then, with planning and discussion, the dates can be scheduled to the best advantage of all staff and the potential negative effects of doing too much at any one given time are greatly reduced. The resulting professional development calendar is designed including these dates, bene-

fitting both the staff involved *and* student learning.

For the best start possible, it is important that ALL initiatives are evaluated in terms of time required and impact on the school or district as a whole. Adjustments to schedules and assignments are made to maximize the many necessary efforts needed, allowing teachers to grow in their ability to assist student learning, while managing all of those efforts and responsibilities that do not change with a new year.