

Systematic Implementation to Achieve a Systemic Vision

In current school accreditation models, the existence of a systems approach is valued and evidence of that approach is necessary for a favorable review. Accreditation teams are looking for indications of examining the whole system as well as documentation on taking care of the details. One accreditation team's review of a school district stated that "The district has a strong understanding of the *big picture* but does not seem to have a method of reaching their desired outcomes."

Identifying the big picture is an example of systems thinking. Systems thinking is a frequently used term within education circles, as well as industry discussions, but many participants in those discussions are not aware that there are two critical aspects of that view – systemic vision and systematic implementation. Vision and implementation are partners in the entire change process. Each can be defined as follows: Systemic change (*vision*) is "change that pervades all parts of a system, taking into account the interrelationships and interdependencies among those parts." Systematic change (*implementation*) is defined as "to be methodical in procedure or plan, or marked by thoroughness and regularity."

Attention to one aspect of systems thinking without attention to the other can lead a district to a false expectation of success.

Systemic change (vision) demands that all subsystems and constituent parts be considered



for potential impacts by proposed change. Then, all members (the working parts) of the systems and subsystems must be involved in the discussions and thoroughly briefed as to the rationale of the change and the new reality in which the system as a whole is expected to operate. Without the input of the interrelated and interdependent parts of the larger system, there is little chance of successful transition. The working parts of a system each have a specific role in the success of the system. Without the opportunity to study the change and to evaluate and communicate the potential impact of the change, the *parts* of the system may work at less than peak efficiency and result in the appearance of conflict with change. In a school district, a permanent, representative group of the separate systems or subsystems is necessary to continuously review and monitor success or determine need for change.

Systematic change (implementation) is critical to prevent breakdowns within the system. The concept of systematic change implies planning for timelines for the subsystems and parts to

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implement their necessary steps. Once the systemic view is clearly defined, the systematic changes must be planned for implementation and maintenance. Too often, continuous attention to the health or needs of each aspect is not planned and falls by the wayside. With a group of representative stakeholders to maintain *systemic* view, the *systematic* needs become a regular detail to be considered and discussed.

A systems approach to decision making provides a basis for continued health of a school district. Both aspects of the systems approach demand attention. The number of “moving parts” within a district demands a *systemic* vision and a *systematic* approach to implementing the vision. The “big picture” is important to see, but without the details of the “picture” the meaning is often lost or unclear.