

BOARD BRIEF

Date: July 19, 2019

For ACTION

For INFORMATION

Board Agenda: Yes

No

FROM: Clinton Page, Chief Accountability Officer
Natalie Mitchell, Director of Title I Programs
Angela Green, Testing and Improvement Analyst

THROUGH: Gregory C. Hutchings, Jr., Ed.D., Superintendent of Schools

TO: The Honorable Cindy Anderson, Chair, and
Members of the Alexandria City School Board

TOPIC: School Improvement Planning Quarter 4 Chats

SUMMARY:

The last quarterly chats in SY 18-19 are designed to support school teams in leveraging reflections from the past year in order to plan for the coming year. School teams are being brought together over the month of July for facilitated conversations aimed at identifying the root causes of their predictable problems, and determining the key levers to focus on to spur change in the upcoming year. An external certified facilitator and accredited leadership coach, Jennifer Hughes, has led schools through these discussions.

BACKGROUND:

ACPS undertook a revised School Improvement Planning (SIP) process in the past school year. The impetus for this change, while multifaceted, can be summed simply into three key areas:

- **Alignment** – with state and federal requirements, to eliminate redundancies, and to ensure all schools and departments are utilizing the same language, process, and tools in their improvement planning work.
- **Prioritization** – to strategically highlight the areas and the actions that, when implemented, will most effectively advance the work of schools and departments in their continuous improvement efforts and in sustaining lasting change.
- **Measurement** – to refine processes wherein schools and departments support one another via an iterative practice of reviewing strategies in use, and examining their impact on the overall goal area through pre-identified formative measures.

In the Quarter 4 Chats, schools have engaged in the next phase of the school improvement planning process; consideration of revisions to SIPs. In planning for next school year, schools have undergone focused reflection on the current SIP, identified root causes of our predictable problems, and will use that information to inform potential edits to SIPs. SIPs should be viewed as multiyear documents, therefore in a majority of cases, edits may be more nuanced in nature.

BOARD BRIEF

The goal of these workshops is for school teams to develop a shared understanding of the root causes within SIP goal areas and identify high-leverage strategies to facilitate improvement. To achieve this outcome, school teams come to the chat having: reviewed last year's SIP with identified areas of success and continued focus, used key data elements to inform discussions for the coming year, and have identified predictable problems in each SIP area.

Predictable problems are defined as those challenges within schools that are recurrent and persistent in nature across years. To begin to address these long standing challenges, educators must afford time to deeply understand the system that is causing these challenges. Too frequently within organizations, the root causes of predictable problems are never explored. This leads to quick-fix solutions that only address the surface of the problem, allowing for the roots to persist.

Exploring the system that causes our predictable problems requires a level of vulnerability, listening, and professional humility that is not common within broader American culture. To assist teams in this work, the Quarter 4 Chats have allowed individuals and school teams to explore the topics of trust, listening, and internal beliefs and judgements in how they frame an individual's sense-making and actions. These topics also reinforce requisite skills needed within equity work regarding self-awareness, reflection, and listening.

Within the Quarter 4 Chats, school teams unpack the system and identify the root causes of one predictable problem within their context. Through exposure to multiple perspectives within team discussions, all team members are afforded new perspectives on the problem they confront and its root causes. Teams then go through a prioritization activity to identify the root causes that must be addressed first. The prioritized areas then become the focus of the essential strategies within their SIP for the coming year.

Please view the attached PowerPoint and notes for a more detailed understanding of the work taking place with school teams.

RECOMMENDATION: The Superintendent recommends the School Board review the School Improvement Planning Board Brief and attached PowerPoint for an understanding of the work being undertaken by school teams in July to facilitate planning for the coming year.

IMPACT: To date staff has been engaged, reflective, and excited within the chats. One word reflections at the close of the sessions offered by staff include: motivated, empowered, courage, inspired, purposeful, and energized. This will be a continuous journey with school teams throughout the year, supported by quarterly chats and incorporating these themes into future professional learning opportunities and equity discussions.

ATTACHMENTS: *(1) SIP Planning Workshop PowerPoint and Notes*

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