From Initiative Fatigue to Initiative Integration

Getting the Most Out of CALI

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"Simplify, Simplify, Simplify"
- Henry David Thoreau

"One **simplify** would have been enough"
- *Ralph Waldo Emerson*

"Holistic and reciprocal accountability will lead to improved student outcomes"

-Connecticut State Department of Education's Theory of Action

The Connecticut Accountability for Learning Initiative, or CALI, is **mandated** by the Connecticut State Department of Education as the **District Improvement Process** for Partner School Districts in the state (those districts that have been identified as in need of whole district improvement for not making adequate yearly progress targets for five consecutive years).

Professional Development in the CALI improvement process is provided through the Connecticut State Department of Education and Regional Education Service Center/State Education Service Center via a Trainer of Trainers model. Central office personnel, building administrators and teachers should be trained in the CALI improvement process. In total there are currently 11 days of basic training offered, broken down into 5 training modules. * The modules can be delivered in any order; they are all necessary in order to achieve the goal of improved student achievement. The rationale for this flexibility (or differentiation) is the need to honor the work that is on going in the districts, to build on success so that these improvement factors, coupled with data, determine the best entry point for districts.

The expectation from the Commissioner of Education is that all teachers and schools in identified Partner School Districts will have data teams, and use the practices outlined in the CALI modules.

Doug Reeves and the Leadership and Learning Center developed the first four basic training modules. They are:

- Common Formative Assessments (2 days)
- Data Driven Decision Making/Data Teams (2 days)
- Effective Teaching Strategies and (2 days)
- Making Standards Work (3 days)

 More modules are being developed by the Connecticut State Department of Education.

- School Climate (2 days)
- English Language Learners (TBD)
- Leadership (TBD)
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*In the '08 – '09 school year additional training for coaches and leaders will include: SRBI, Coaching Data teams, Coaching ETS, School Improvement Planning and NCLB, Leading Change and Getting Everyone On Board, and Classroom Data: Feedback, Follow-up and Follow-through.
*Additional training for leaders will include: Leading change, classroom data, SIP, CALI Overview for Paraprofessionals.

There are two basic concepts that all stake holders' need to grasp in order for the work to make sense: *Synergy* and *Student & Standards*.

SYNERGY

In order for the district improvement process to succeed there must be synergy between all parts of the process including making connections with the previous work that has been done in each district. It is more important initially to get the all the basic CALI modules up and running (data teams, effective teaching strategies, common formative assessments, making standards work, school climate) than it is to get them all perfect. This requires leadership that understands the big picture, has a vision of how it will all work and a plan for start-up and continuous refinement of the process.

Initiative Fatigue

Major issues need to be addressed in order to avoid initiative fatigue:

- Stake holders must see the *relationship* between the CALI modules
- Leaders must connect CALI to on-going district initiatives
- A feedback loop needs to be developed between all levels of the system, state and local

The relationship between CALI modules: There is *one* process – it has been broken down into *multiple modules* to facilitate training. There is a tendency to see the modules as separate rather than as parts of one improvement process. Each module represents a significant field of research. Each has its own manual, PowerPoint presentation, books, references and trainers. Trainers have a tendency to want to "improve" or "elaborate" on the module they teach and may not understand the other modules. Staff members will most likely be exposed to the modules at different times, in different orders. Failure to understand the relationship between the modules is a major source of initiative fatigue.

On-going initiatives: Each district was working on school and district improvement before the CALI initiative began. Significant effort has been put into these initiatives and insufficient time has elapsed to show results. Those efforts must be integrated into the CALI philosophy or thoughtfully terminated in order to maintain staff morale. More often than not there will be obvious connections between the on going initiatives and the mandated district improvement process. Failure to make those connections explicit is a major source of initiative fatigue.

Communication: In order to avoid the inevitable confusion and frustration it is imperative that district leadership plans and prepares to address the above mentioned issues with staff. This will require:

- Diligent review of the "big picture" school and district improvement process and how it impacts individuals with respect to expectations and behaviors in the system
- Explicit communication regarding on-going initiatives with respect to the CALI initiative: it is imperative that there is one system for leaders to communicate regarding progress and barriers.
- Close communication with the State Department of Education and the RESCs.

STUDENTS and STANDARDS

The CALI district improvement process comes down to two things: Students and attainment of Standards. Understanding students and understanding standards, in combination, is done formally through the *Data-Driven Decision Making /Data Teams & Making Standards Work* processes. The processes involve all levels of a school district and provide for efficient feedback from the classroom to the grade level to the building to the district and back again.   Data teams functions at all levels:

- District Data Team
- School Data Team
- Instructional (Grade Level/Course) Data Team

The bridge between the standards and the students comes through the district's improvement goals and decisions regarding the Priority Standards. Every adult in the district needs to understand the standards, understand the how students do with respect to the standards, and be involved in the data team process.

STEP ONE:
District Data Team arrives at District Improvement Plan Tier I Goals (student achievement goals) based on student data. The central office determines how to examine the standards and how to select the Priority Standards based on student data – this may be a "democratic" or "representational" exercise. Priority Standards are district-specific and should give leverage in other content areas, reflect skills and content that will endure for students throughout their school career and life, and make students ready for the next grade and high-stakes assessments. Composition of the district team should include teacher representative(s), parent representative(s), union representative(s), Board of Education representative(s).

STEP TWO:
School Data Teams arrive at how to support the District Improvement Plan Goals and the Priority Standards by developing School Improvement Plans based on student data. The District Data Team should approve the plan and provide technical assistance as needed.

STEP THREE:
Instructional Data Teams arrive at how to meet the building and district goals by developing Common Formative Assessments and implementing Effective Teaching Strategies and performance based assessments to meet the Priority Standards based on student data.

STEP FOUR:
Feedback is looped from the grade level/course data teams back through the school data team to the district data team.

Students:

Knowing the students as children and as learners is critical. This is child specific, classroom specific and district specific. How the school climate is developed, which effective teaching strategies are selected and what the priority standards are will be different depending on the children.

- The Improving **School Climate** module describes the necessary conditions for learning to occur. It provides a foundation upon which practices such as *Responsive Classroom, Positive Behavioral Supports (PBS), Therapeutic Crisis Intervention (TCI), Addressing Barriers To Learning* can stand.

- The **Effective Teaching Strategies** module describes 9 research-based categories of instructional strategies that should be used on a regular basis in classrooms along with non-fiction writing. School Data Teams select from among these strategies though the data team process and are observed by the principal via lesson plans, walk-throughs and observations.

Standards:

- The **Making Standards Work** module describes the process for examining the standards presented in the Model for Curriculum that includes State Standards and Grade Level Expectations. This work is done at all levels, district, building, and grade level.
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    o The difference between *Making Standards Work* and *Understanding by Design* is that *Making Standards Work* begins with the standards. Both curriculum formats focus on Big Ideas, Essential Questions, and performance-based assessments.
        ▪ Priority Standards are determined at the district level so that students in classrooms across the district are all afforded equitable learning opportunities. This strategy is critical to ensure district-wide systemic improvement, and is especially important in districts with high student mobility rates.

- The **Common Formative Assessment** module describes the process used by instructional data teams to link instruction and assessment to the standards.
    - CFA: Given before and during instruction: common across grade levels/content areas
    - Formative: given before and during the teaching process
    - Teacher created NOT teacher invented
        - Parts of mandated assessments (e.g. LAS Links, DRA or a curriculum based assessments) can be used to create a CFA, but they must be curriculum-based.
    - Scored but not used to assign grades
    - Ideally there would be a monthly CFA – brief, no more than three questions, this is data that is cycled through the 5 Step Data team Process.