



Indistar[®]



Lighting our path to stellar learning[®]
www.indistar.org



Academic Development Institute

Academic Development Institute

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Indistar[®]



Indicator: Something such as a light, sign, or pointer that gives information about which direction to follow

Star: Celebrated, prominent, or distinguished; preeminent; point of light in night sky: an astronomical object usually visible as a small bright point of light in the night sky

Stellar: Exceptionally good, star-like

Lighting our path to stellar learning[®]

Specificity Matters

Indistar's indicators of effective practice are specific, plain language guideposts, aligned with research. In fact, the indicators are so specific that they can be easily assessed, clearly aligned with people responsible, set to timelines, coached, and tracked for high-quality implementation. Specificity matters.

What is Indistar®?

Indistar® is a web-based tool that guides a district or school Leadership Team in charting its improvement and managing the continuous or rapid improvement process. Indistar® is called different things in different states. For example, Mississippi calls it Mississippi SOARS, the Bureau of Indian Education calls it Native Star, and Idaho calls it the WISE tool. The system is also tailored for the purposes of each state, its districts, and its schools.

Indistar® is premised on the firm belief that district and school improvement is best accomplished when directed by the people closest to the students. While the state provides a framework for the process, each district or school Leadership Team applies its own ingenuity to achieve the results it desires for its students—students it knows and cares about.

Providing a district or school Leadership Team with an improvement process that encourages local ingenuity and responsibility changes the dynamic between localities and the state. It also requires a “culture of candor” in which district and school personnel talk openly and honestly about their professional practices that contribute to student learning.

Placing this high level of confidence in the ability of district and school personnel to chart their own course also requires that the district or school team is given convenient access to tools, resources, and effective practice to get the job done.

Indistar®, by whatever name, includes *Wise Ways*® research and practice briefs to support its indicators of effective practice. Indistar® also provides *Indicators in Action*™ video modules demonstrating the practices, and the technology for capacity builders to coach the Leadership Team in real time. Indistar® enables coaches to assist a team with coaching comments and reviews about the team’s ongoing work.

The state can differentiate the system to accommodate “zones” of districts or schools. For example, the system will allow for a “rapid improvement” or turnaround track that includes different indicators than a “continuous improvement” track.

The bottom line is that Indistar® will guide Leadership Teams—whether district, school, or both—through a continuous cycle of assessing, planning, implementing, and progress tracking. Focus will be clear, responsibilities assigned, efforts synchronized.

- ★ **Innovation.** Indistar® is a structure to guide high-quality work by school and district Leadership Teams with built-in flexibility to encourage local innovation.
- ★ **Research Alignment.** Indistar’s Wise Ways® technology links each indicator to a succinct synthesis of the related research, examples, and resources.
- ★ **Capacity.** Indistar® builds the district’s capacity to support the improvement of its schools while directly guiding a school’s improvement activities.
- ★ **Documentation.** Indistar® provides practical documentation through built-in mechanisms for creating agendas, recording minutes, assigning responsibility, setting timelines, allocating resources, coaching, and monitoring degree of implementation.
- ★ **Operational Data.** Indistar® delivers the “other side of the data equation,” the district, school, and classroom behaviors and practices that contribute to student learning. Practice must improve in order for results to improve.
- ★ **Unique to State.** Indistar® becomes the state’s unique system, accessible through its own website, given its own name, and aligned with existing improvement initiatives.





Indistar's goal is every student learning and the adults connected with a school driving its improvement for the sake of their own students.

- ★ **Electronic Reporting.** Indistar® includes a state administrative page that allows for convenient monitoring of each district's and school's progress and access to electronically submitted forms and reports. Forms and reports submitted electronically by schools and districts may be reviewed by the state and returned with comments before final approval. Forms and reports of this type are commonly used to satisfy state and federal requirements.
- ★ **Progress Tracking.** Indistar® provides charts that track and display progress.

What state challenges does Indistar® address?

Indistar® addresses multiple challenges faced by state education agencies, answering the following questions:

1. **How do we ensure that practices are aligned with research?** ADI and states have spent the time researching and identifying the behaviors and practices that result in improved teaching and learning so that the district and school can spend its time implementing them; practices are aligned with research and best practice
- via Wise Ways® summaries embedded in the system and available for download.
2. **How do we assist a growing number of districts and schools in need of improvement with limited staff and resources?** Indistar's web-based technology does the traveling so that people don't have to, allowing coaching, monitoring, and reporting via the web.
3. **How do we build capacity and responsibility in districts and schools?** Built-in training and coaching components, as well as research resources, transform district and school Leadership Teams into highly-skilled, focused, and productive forces for improvement.
4. **How do we efficiently differentiate supports to address each district's and school's unique needs?** Indistar® provides parallel tracks for schools requiring rapid improvement (turnaround) and those on a continuous improvement trajectory. Additionally, the state may specify "key indicators" that are given special emphasis. The system will also provide different tracks for high school, middle school, and elementary school.

Evidence of Effectiveness

Indistar® was first developed in 2007 for use by the Virginia Department of Education and has since been adopted by an additional twenty-three states and the Bureau of Indian Education. Virginia employed the system first at the district level in 30 districts in conditional accreditation status or with schools in restructuring or conditional accreditation status. In the second year, Virginia added the school-level system and the Instructional Leadership Academy. Over these two years, a cohort of 27 schools demonstrated the following results:

Schools with Gains in Reading: 26 (96.2%)

Schools with Gains in Math: 26 (96.2%)

2007 Reading

Mean Percent of Students Scoring Proficient or Better: 67.01%

2009 Reading

Mean Percent of Students Scoring Proficient or Better: 80.48%

Mean Gain in Reading: 13.47 percentage points

2007 Math

Mean Percent of Students Scoring Proficient or Better: 55.28%

2009 Math

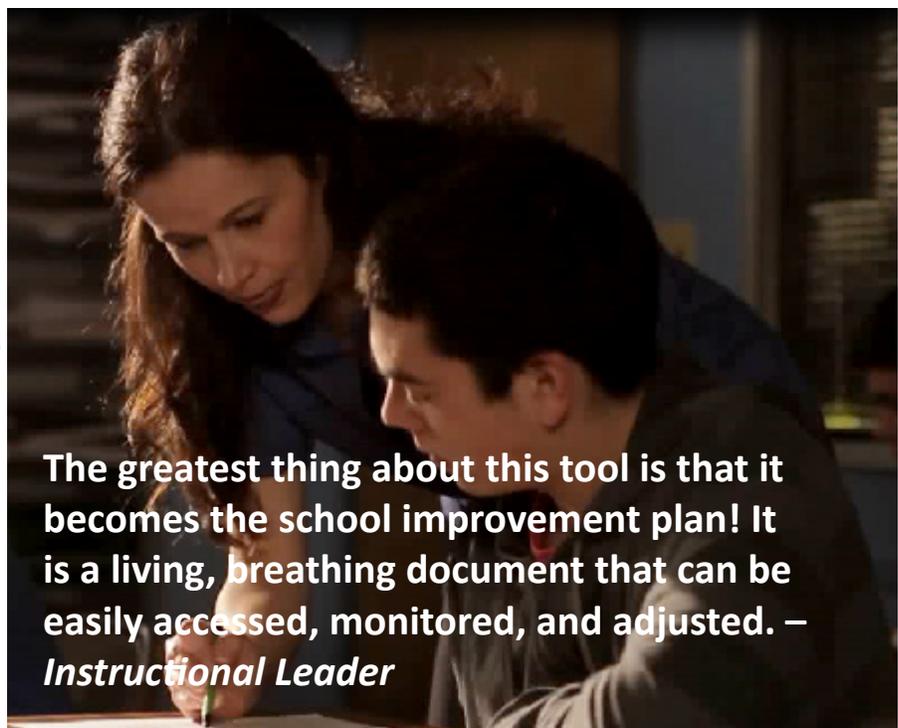
Mean Percent of Students Scoring Proficient or Better: 75.37%

Mean Gain in Math: 20.09 percentage points

based on turnaround leadership research, with coaching from a rapid improvement mentor; the system can be targeted for use in schools in the process of turnaround or transformation.

- 7. How do we cultivate expertise to carry out the work of school improvement?** Indistar® maximizes the availability of existing talent, making experts “virtually” accessible to coach multiple districts or schools in the implementation of effective practices, while simultaneously cultivating a new crop of coaches to join the ranks.
- 8. How do we eliminate the silos within our agency and our system of support?** Indistar® lets users see how the dots of school improvement connect—and where they overlap—so that efforts reinforce one another, rather than compete. Funding and program silos are dismantled with communication applications that promote collaboration and transparency across agencies and levels, resulting in streamlined efforts and on-going assessment of what’s working and where adjustments are needed.

- 5. How do we check for Title I compliance and other regulations without burdening districts and schools with multiple processes?** Indistar’s dashboard serves as a single portal through which most planning and reporting requirements can be accessed and documents submitted. This simplified approach reduces duplication and provides for convenient, electronic submission of reports.
- 6. How can we establish a “turnaround zone” with Indistar®?** Indistar’s special features for schools in rapid improvement include a planning tool for the principal



**The greatest thing about this tool is that it becomes the school improvement plan! It is a living, breathing document that can be easily accessed, monitored, and adjusted. —
Instructional Leader**

The Academic Development Institute (ADI) has pioneered a web-based, school improvement system that simultaneously connects the multiple points of improvement while building the capacity of people from state to district to school to classroom.



9. **How do we clarify the roles of personnel involved in improvement?** Indistar® prompts users to assign responsibility to individuals for implementing and monitoring tasks so that roles and expectations are clear for everyone.
10. **How do we maintain an intense instructional focus to impact student learning?** Indistar® focuses on building and sustaining a strong instructional core, with an emphasis on aligned and differentiated instruction.

Who uses Indistar®?

A state adopts the system. The system is then available to all districts and schools served by the state. The system takes on the state's identity, and users access it through the state's own website. The system connects users from all levels to establish a coherent and high-functioning system for improvement. One person from each Leadership Team (district or school) is designated to serve as Process Manager. The Process Manager interfaces with the system to prepare team meeting agendas, worksheets, and Wise Ways®. The Process Manager also enters the team's minutes and work plans into Indistar®. Coaches (engaged by the school or provided by the state, district, or charter organization) are given access to the system so that they can follow the progress of the work and provide coaching comments and reviews for the team. Superintendents and principals are given full access to the system. The district, or school may also issue "guest"

logins to groups—teachers, parents, school board members, for example—who can then view progress charts and reports without editing data.

How is the system customized for each state?

The system is entered via login and password through the state's website and displays the state's name and the name the state chooses to call the system. The state may use the indicators provided by the system, its own indicators, or a combination. The state may also include its own rubrics in the system and specify a subset of indicators as "key indicators" to be given special emphasis. The state determines which consulting roles will be utilized in the system; for example coaches for district Leadership Teams, coaches for school teams, mentors for rapid improvement principals, and district liaisons to school teams. Also, the state may add other reporting requirements to the system so that districts and schools may use one portal to prepare and submit all required reports.

How was Indistar® created?

Indistar® was created by ADI, working directly with several state education agencies and revising the system as the states engaged their districts and schools with the process. ADI continues to constantly upgrade the system in response to states' needs and suggestions. ADI also tailors the system to specific state's needs as much as possible.

How is Indistar® organized? What is its structure?

Indistar® is built around the core functions performed by each level of the education system, effective practices at each level, and indicators of effective practice. A core function is a central, operational purpose of a state, district, or school. An effective practice is a way of operating (related to a core function) that is shown by both research and evidence in real-world application to contribute to student learning. An indicator is an observable expression of a practice, something concrete that indicates that an effective practice is in place.

How will Indistar® help advance a district's or school's goals?

Goals are typically constructed around a district's or school's core functions, such as Leadership, Curriculum, Professional Development, or Instruction. They are often broad statements that advance a mission. Specific, detailed actions are then necessary to attain a goal. Indistar® drives the specific, detailed actions. Indistar's indicators of effective practices are research-based ways of doing things that add meaning to global goals. The indicators of effective practice are specific, plain language guideposts, aligned with research. In fact, the indicators are so specific that they

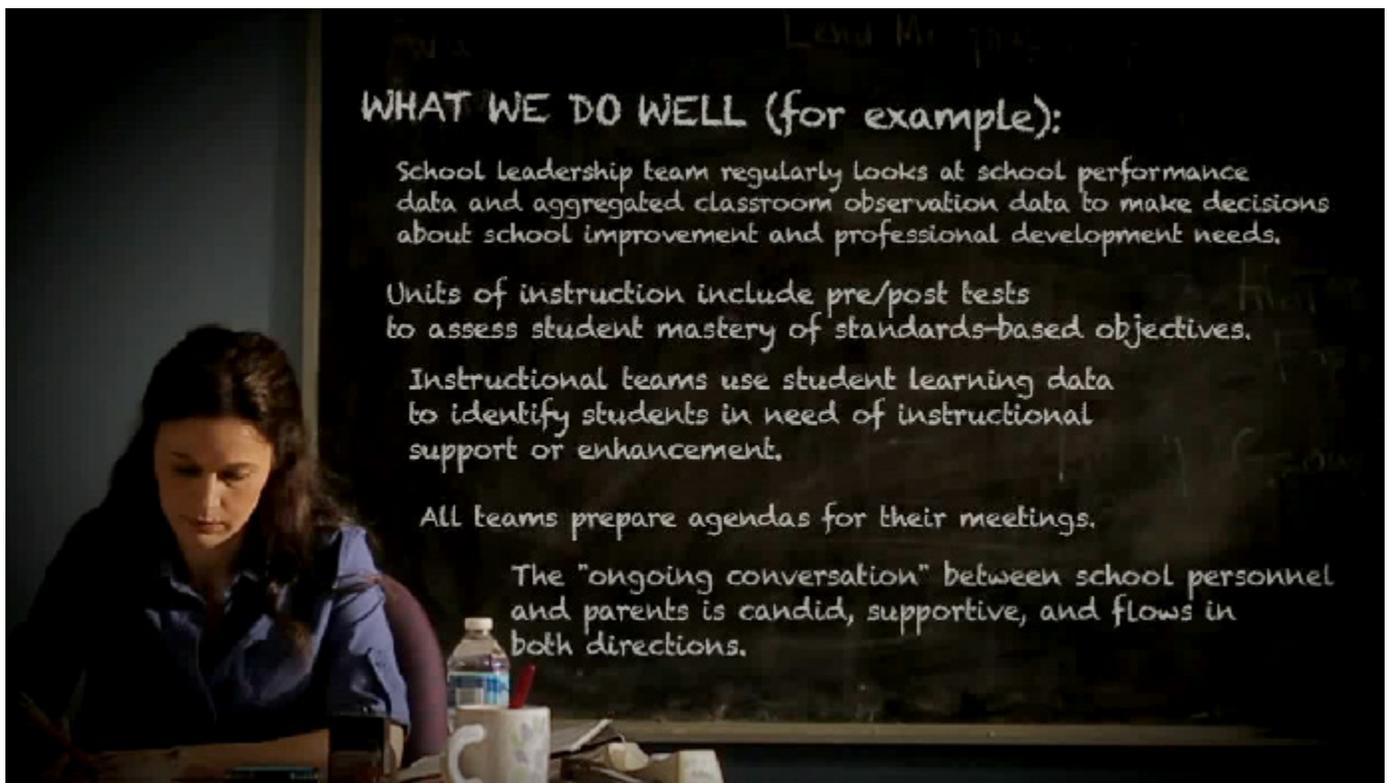
can be easily assessed, clearly aligned with people responsible, set to timelines, coached, and tracked for high-quality implementation. Specificity matters.

How many core functions, effective practices, and indicators are there?

A state can populate the system with its own set of indicators, use those developed by ADI, or a combination. The indicators developed by ADI are organized into the following tracks:

- ★ District Improvement: 1 core function, 4 effective practices, 38 indicators
- ★ School (Continuous Improvement for schools making adequate progress): 5 core functions, 17 effective practices, 168 indicators
- ★ School (Rapid Improvement for schools needing a steep improvement trajectory): 4 core functions, 14 effective practices, 82 indicators
- ★ Rapid Improvement Leader (principal): 1 core function; 4 effective practices, 14 indicators

When states provide their own district or school indicators, or create their own template from those provided, the number of indicators typically ranges from 20 to 40 for districts and from 40 to 100 for schools.

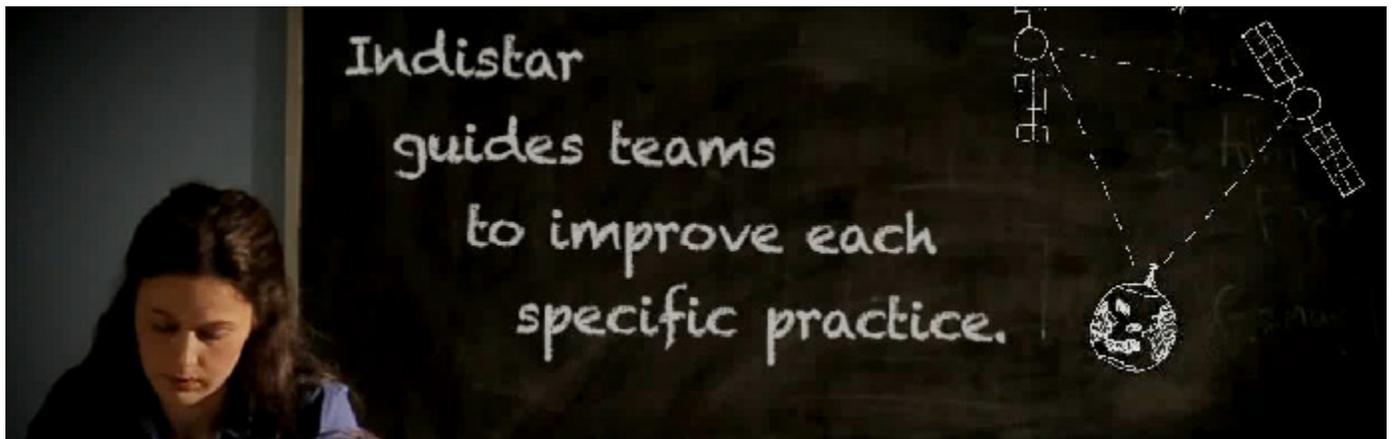


What are examples of core functions, effective practices, and indicators?

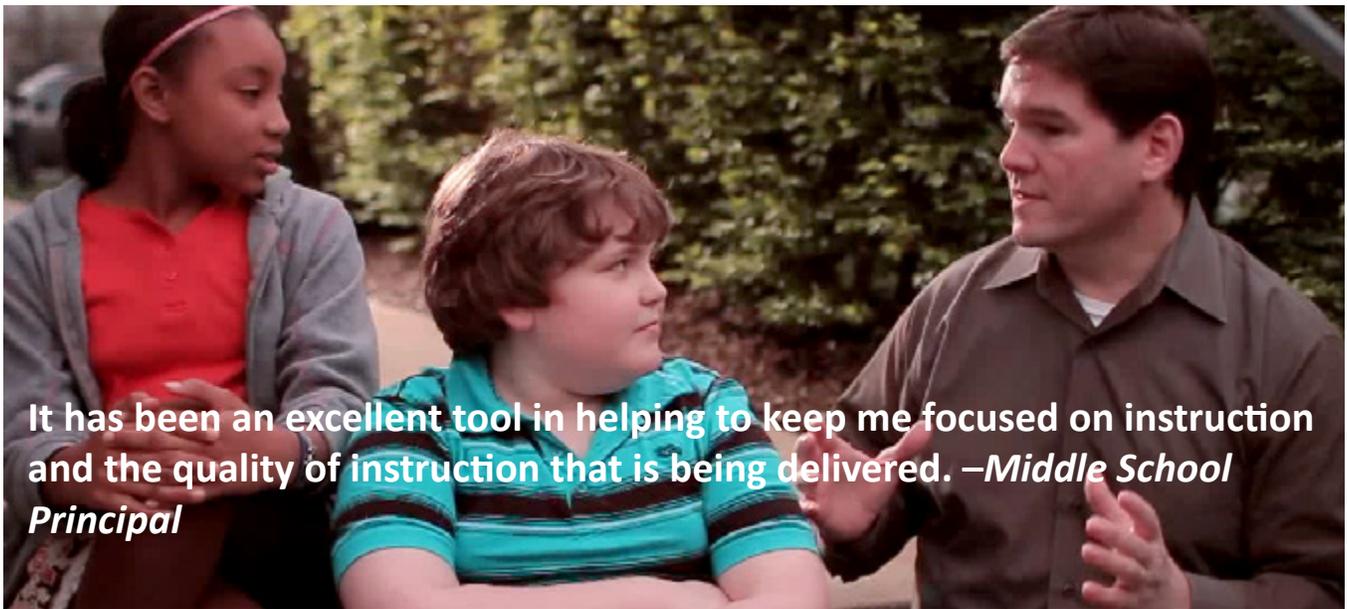
The indicators provided by the system include the following examples shown in the tables below. Again, a state may create its own template of effective practices and indicators or provide a template already in use by the state.

The core functions, effective practices, and examples of indicators provided by the system include the following:

District Improvement		
Core District Functions	Effective Practices	Indicators (Examples)
District Context and Support for School Improvement	Improving the school within a framework of district support	The district provides schools with technology, training, and support for integrated data collection, reporting, and analysis systems.
	Taking the change process into account	The district provides a cohesive district curriculum guide aligned with state standards or otherwise places curricular expectation on the school.
	Clarifying district-school expectations	The school reports and documents its progress monthly to the superintendent, and the superintendent reports the school's progress to the school board.
	Establishing a team structure with specific duties and time for instructional planning	A team structure is officially incorporated into the school improvement plan and school governance policy.



School Improvement		
Core School Functions	Effective Practices	Indicators (Examples)
Leadership and Decision Making	Team Structure	All teams operate with work plans for the year and specific work products to produce.
	Principal's Role	The principal spends at least 50% of his/her time working directly with teachers to improve instruction, including classroom observations.
	Professional Development	Professional development for the whole faculty includes assessment of strengths and areas in need of improvement from classroom observations of indicators of effective teaching.



It has been an excellent tool in helping to keep me focused on instruction and the quality of instruction that is being delivered. –Middle School Principal

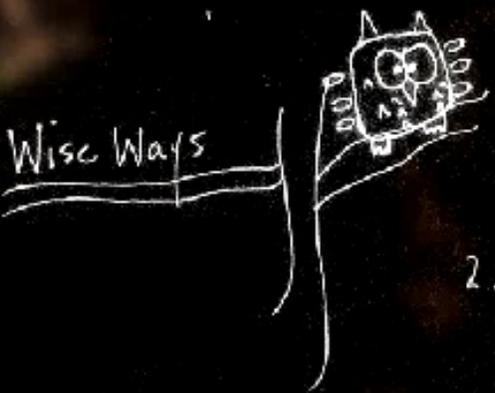
School Improvement		
Core School Functions	Effective Practices	Indicators (Examples)
Curriculum, Assessment, and Instructional Planning	Aligned Instruction	Instructional Teams develop standards-aligned units of instruction for each subject and grade level.
Classroom Instruction	Instruction—Preparation	All teachers differentiate assignments (individualize instruction) in response to individual student performance on pre-tests and other methods of assessment.
	Instruction—Lesson Introduction	All teachers use modeling, demonstration, and graphics.
	Instruction—Interaction	All teachers encourage students to paraphrase, summarize, and relate.
	Instruction—Student-Directed Group or Independent	All teachers interact instructionally with students (explaining, checking, giving feedback).
	Classroom Management	When waiting for assistance from the teacher, students are occupied with curriculum-related activities provided by the teacher.

School Improvement		
Core School Functions	Effective Practices	Indicators (Examples)
School Community	The purpose, policies, and practices of the school community are defined.	The school's homework policy stresses the importance of checking, marking, and promptly returning homework.
	The school provides two-way, school-home communication linked to learning.	The school's Compact, homework policy, and learning standards are routinely reviewed and discussed at open houses and parent-teacher conferences.
	The school educates parents to support their children's learning and teachers to work with parents.	Professional development programs for teachers include assistance in working effectively with parents.
	The school connects members of the school community to support student learning.	The school provides opportunities for parents to get to know each other and discuss the curriculum of the home.



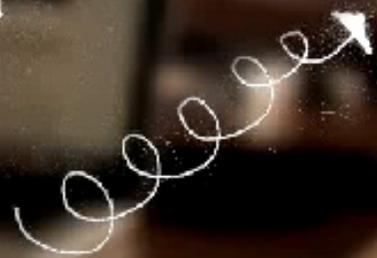
The magic of Indistar® lies not in its technology but in the assistance it provides for a district or school Leadership Team to efficiently drive improvement. Indistar® is a tool for people working in teams.

Indistar Features



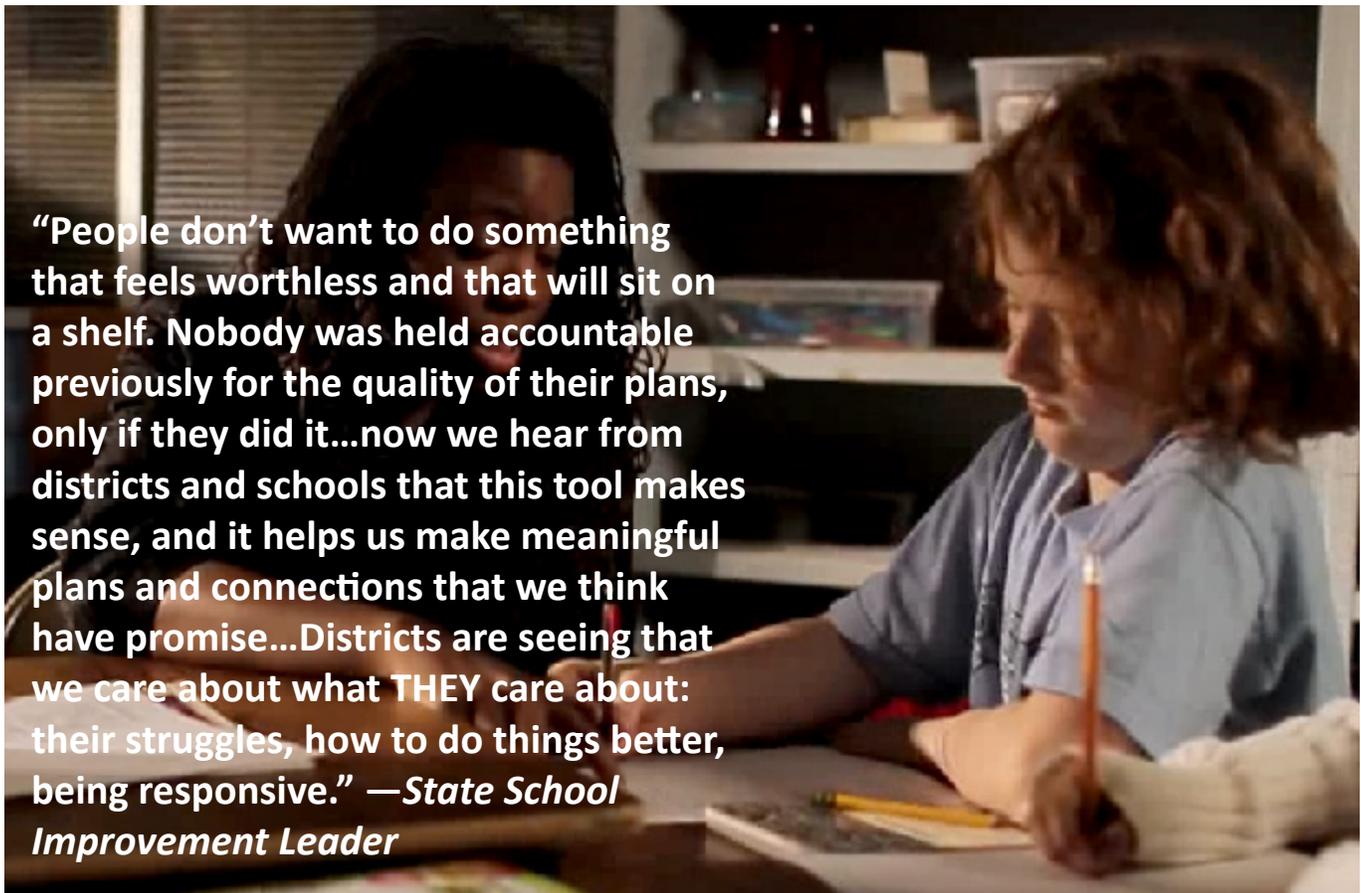
3. Coaching Feature
* * * * *

2. Indicators in Action



I love, love, love what Indistar® makes possible. Great tool! Talk about a useful way to ask people to think reflectively about their practices. Thanks!

Rapid Improvement Leaders		
Core Leader Function	Effective Practice	Indicators (Examples)
Leadership for Rapid Improvement	Initial Analysis and Problem Solving	The Rapid Improvement leader personally analyzes data about the organization's performance to identify high-priority problems that can be fixed quickly.
	Driving for Results	Rapid Improvement leader replaces or redeploys some staff as necessary based on careful examination of skills and readiness for change.
	Influencing Inside and Outside the School	Rapid Improvement leader uses various tactics to help staff empathize with those they serve and be motivated for change.
	Measuring, Reporting, Improving	Rapid Improvement leader shares results in open-air meetings to hold all staff accountable for results and to focus on solving problems.



“People don’t want to do something that feels worthless and that will sit on a shelf. Nobody was held accountable previously for the quality of their plans, only if they did it...now we hear from districts and schools that this tool makes sense, and it helps us make meaningful plans and connections that we think have promise...Districts are seeing that we care about what THEY care about: their struggles, how to do things better, being responsive.” —State School Improvement Leader

How are the indicators aligned with research?

For each indicator, a Wise Ways® link is included in the system as well as on the guest page for convenient access by the Leadership Team, faculty, and others. The indicators provided by Indistar® are drawn from research syntheses prepared by ADI and available also in books and monographs and downloadable from the Indistar website (www.indistar.org). ADI’s *Handbook on Restructuring and Substantial School Improvement*, a research synthesis aligned to Indistar’s district and school indicators, was recognized as the outstanding research publication of the year in 2008 by Division H of the American Educational Research Association.

What about using rubrics?

The state may provide rubrics to guide districts and schools in assessing indicators developed by the state. Indistar’s own district and school indicators are sufficiently specific to not require rubrics. If a state uses its own district and school indicators with accompanying rubrics, the system presents those rubrics for the Leadership Team to use in assessing the indicators, and the rubric score is recorded. Examples

of evidence and related material may also be included in the system with the rubrics.

What are the logical steps in the cyclical improvement process?

Assessing indicators. The Leadership Team first selects an effective practice for its initial focus. The team then considers an individual indicator related to that practice, discusses it, and comes to a decision about the level to which this indicator is currently being met. If the team decides the indicator is being fully met, it is asked to provide evidence for this decision. If the team decides the indicator is not being met at all, it is asked to determine if the indicator will be further considered for development. If the team determines that the indicator is being partially met, it is asked to describe the current level of implementation. For all indicators that are partially met or not met but considered for development, the system asks the team to prioritize the importance of the indicator and determine the relative ease with which it can be accomplished. The Priority/Opportunity Index is then recorded for the indicator, enabling the team to gain quick wins.



Planning for full implementation of indicators.

Once an indicator has been assessed and the Leadership Team agrees to include it in its plan, the system moves to the planning mode. In the planning mode, the indicator is now automatically rephrased as an objective to be achieved. The team describes how it will look when the objective is fully met and constructs a plan to achieve it. The plan includes a list of tasks leading to achievement of the objective, along with persons responsible and target dates.

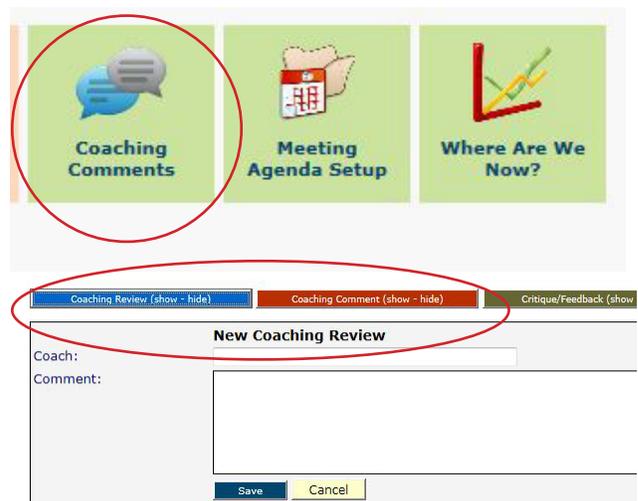
Implementation and monitoring of progress. As each task in the plan is completed, a completion date and comments are recorded by the Process Manager. When all the tasks for an objective are completed, the system asks if the objective has been met. If the Leadership Team believes the objective is met, the system asks for a status report describing the evidence that the objective has been met. If the team believes the objective has not yet been met, it is instructed to develop more tasks. Each time all the tasks are completed, the system asks for a new status report until the objective is met. Once an objective is met, it will be flagged for a new assessment at a later date (in one or two years, as determined by the state).

What reporting tools are provided?

Indistar® provides standard reports that can be generated at any time, printed, or saved in a variety of document formats. Reports include such things as: agendas, minutes, lists of indicators assessed (with ratings and evidence), lists of tasks (by person responsible, by date range, etc.), and comprehensive reports that include everything.

How does the coaching feature work?

Each track includes a coaching feature that allows an external coach to offer feedback to the Leadership Team’s work. Coaches are first approved by the state to have access to the system. For example, the state may designate a coach to assist a district or school team. The coach then reviews the ongoing work of the team and offers comments. The Process Manager is alerted by email that a comment has been entered by a coach, and the team can then reply. The system maintains a thread of the dialogue between the coach and the team, and the comments can be saved or printed as a report. Coaches may also enter more extensive Coaching Reviews.



How can the system be used as part of district or school improvement planning, especially to satisfy Title I requirements?

The cyclical improvement process means that the Leadership Team is always working on its indicators—implementing, monitoring, and improving its plan. This is not a plan that is prepared annually, submitted, and then re-written a year later. It is a continuous improvement process. However, snapshot reports can be generated to demonstrate that an effective plan is in place at a particular point in time. When the superintendent or principal submits that report, notification is automatically delivered to the state administrative page, and the state can access the reports. Not all Title I planning requirements are covered by Indistar®; therefore, additional reports may be added and are submitted in the same fashion. Typically, assurances and one supplemental report are the only additional reports needed to comply with Title I district and school improvement planning processes. Again, these reports can also be submitted through the system and provided to the state. The state may choose to review a report in the system, and the system allows for an exchange between the state reviewer and the district or school until it is accepted for final posting.

Form	Status	Description
School Improvement Supplemental Plan	← Review Completed	For schools required to submit a School Improvement Plan during the current planning cycle.
Schoolwide Program Supplemental Documentation	→ Sent for Review	Completed only by schools seeking approval to operate as a Title I Schoolwide program and updated in each subsequent year.
School AYP/SMART Goals	→ Sent for Review	For schools who have not made AYP.
Corrective Action Plan		For schools in Corrective Action.
Restructuring Plan	← Review Completed	For schools in Restructuring.
Sample State Rubric - School	→ Sent for Review	
Transformation Toolkit Review Form	→ Sent for Review	
School Improvement Grant (SIG) School		

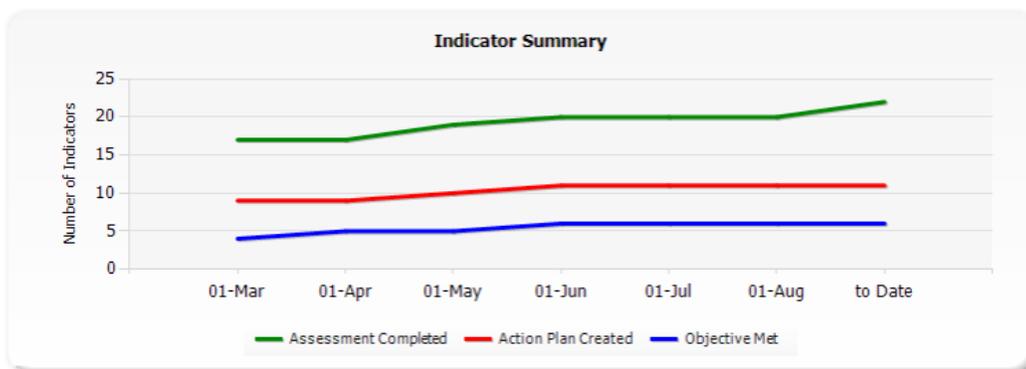
Does the system provide a way for a Leadership Team to see how it is doing—the overall progress at a point in time?

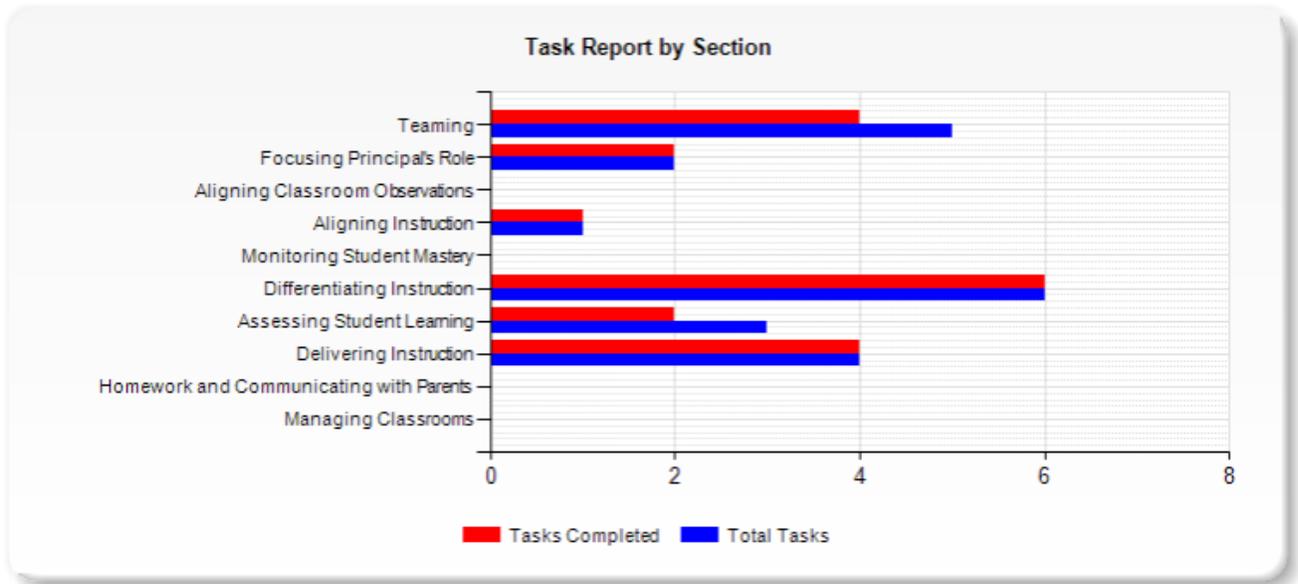
Yes, the Where Are We Now? feature is a single button that generates a quick report with charts tracking the number of indicators assessed, planned, and met over a six-month period, tasks completed by sections, and indicator progress by section as well as lists of indicators “red flagged” for attention, indicators met, and indicators due for follow-up review. This report can be saved or printed for the team at any time. A “guest login” can be issued to people who can view Where Are We Now? without being able to edit content. The “guest login” is ideal for promoting transparency with teachers, parents, and school board members.

Caldwell Elementary School

School Leadership Team RI

Where Are We Now?





How does Indistar® provide the state with convenient tracking of district and school progress?

The state administrative web page displays a summary of the number of districts and schools that have submitted required reports, with access to each district's and school's dashboard as well as to each district's and school's submitted reports. By selecting Show District and School Progress, the state can then see the detailed progress, step-by-step with dates, for each district and school Leadership Team. The state administrative page also includes data mining features and a variety of reports to gauge progress and aggregate data.

2008 2009 2010 2011 2012 2013

School Year: 2013-2014

Select: School Information

District: --- displaying all districts ---

School Group: Indistar - SIP - School Indicators (RI)

School & District Dashboards

Data Mining

Login Activity

Resources

Reports

Summary

School Progress

Submitted Reports

Submitted Reports by District

Critique/Feedback

include also Districts with no Schools enrolled.

State Bulletin Board

School Progress (3)

Indistar - SIP - School Indicators (RI)

SchoolName	Information	Demographics	Test Scores	Team	Assess	Plan	Monitor
Grover Cleveland High Schools (Lincoln)	4/8/2010	9/19/2013	9/1/2013	6/20/2008	9/1/2013	2/24/2009	2/24/2009
Lincoln Junior High School (Lincoln)	7/16/2013	12/11/2013	10/26/2011	1/20/2011	12/16/2013	2/24/2014	2/24/2014

What does Indistar® provide for professional development on the indicators of effective practice?

Indistar® provides a growing library of web-based, professional development modules (Indicators in Action™) for teachers and school leaders. The modules include video demonstrations of many of the indicators, arranged in topics such as: Instructional Planning, Professional Development, Instructional Alignment, Differentiated Instruction, Classroom Management, and Teacher-Directed Instruction, Leadership, and School Community.



Welcome to Indicators in Action!



Indicators in Action is produced by the [Academic Development Institute](#).

Based primarily on ADI's research syntheses, Indicators in Action provides an explanation of indicators of effective practice.

Video clips of:

- principals
- teachers
- teacher teams
- and school teams

show the indicators "in action".



Indicators in Action is ideal for:

- professional development
- faculty meetings
- workshops
- and as a tutorial for individual educators.

What professional development does the state provide for districts and schools using Indistar®?

ADI assists the state in developing a plan to introduce districts and schools to Indistar® and to support their work. In addition to the coaching component in Indistar®, states typically provide orientation meetings and webinars for district and school Leadership Teams to introduce Indistar® and advance their understanding of the effective practices and indicators.



For more information on Indistar
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