Coaching with Indicators
Center on Innovation & Improvement

How school leadership teams guide their schools' continuous improvement
And how **Coaches and Capacity Builders** support their work

School improvement is typically driven by a school-based leadership team. Scrutiny of student learning data informs their decisions and plans. An annual school improvement plan is their primary roadmap. The plan is created and followed for a year, then the cycle starts again. These plans begin by addressing specific subgroups of students and subject areas where the annual assessment shows weakness. The goal is to improve the scores that are low.

Continuous improvement with indicators of effective practice follows a different path. In addition to scrutiny of student learning data, the team analyzes the school staff's professional practices that contribute to the student outcomes. Rather than focusing only on improvement where the last annual test showed weakness, continuous improvement examines professional practices school-wide and seeks to elevate performance across the board, including the most recent areas of deficiency. Instead of creating a plan once a year and then following it, the team engages in a continuous improvement process that is always assessing current practice relative to indicators of effectiveness, planning immediate steps to full implementation, and monitoring progress. Periodically, a snapshot of the work creates a report that marks progress at that point in time, but the improvement cycle continues at pace and without interruption.

The Coach's role in an indicator-based, continuous improvement process is always to build the capacity of the school team to function within a culture of candor, accurately determining the level of implementation of effective practices, striving toward universal and consistent practice. Where does student learning data come into play? Specific indicators address how individual teachers, teacher instructional teams, and the leadership team use real-time data in making decisions, designing instruction, re-teaching, and both elevating expectations for students showing early mastery and providing support for students lagging behind. Truly, each student's progress is closely assessed at many points in time, and instruction is targeted to that student's needs and degree of mastery.

The Coach serves the school best when helping the leadership team understand the meaning of each indicator, gather information necessary for an accurate assessment of current practice relative to the indicator, plan improvement, and monitor results until the team is assured that the practice is fully implemented across the school. The Coach interacts with the team in a way that might be called "metacognitive guidance." That means "thinking out loud" to model for the team how to analyze current performance relative to an indicator and how to plan concrete steps leading to its full implementation. By thinking out loud, asking critical questions, and holding the team to a high level of candor, the Coach embeds in the team the abilities and procedures for continuous improvement.

Examination of current practice provides the opportunity to show where practice is already strong as well as where improvement is needed. Thus, recognizing excellence and deficiencies, the school team builds from strength while honing professional practice in leadership, teaming processes, instructional planning, classroom management, instructional delivery, and school community and family engagement. The emphasis is on what the adults do that makes high student achievement possible.

What is an indicator of effective practice?
An indicator of effective practice is a concrete, behavioral expression of a professional practice that research demonstrates contributes to student learning. An indicator is expressed in plain language so that a school team can answer with certainty whether or not it is standard practice in the school.

What constitutes evidence of full implementation of an indicator of effective practice?
The school team must candidly prove to itself that all the personnel for whom an indicator applies routinely demonstrate effective application of the indicator. The evidence must satisfy the meaning of the indicator and the high standard set by the team. Each indicator must be deconstructed in literal terms, so that the evidence shows clearly that the indicator is met. This does not require reams of documentation, but access to specific data relative to the indicator and a succinct statement that the data are conclusive in showing that the indicator is met.

How does the team prioritize the indicators to gain "quick wins" while also working over a longer time horizon to ultimately implement all indicators?
As each indicator is assessed to determine the current level of implementation, it is also prioritized in terms of its importance and rated according to the difficulty of its achievement. This combination of priority and opportunity produces an index score that the team can take into account in planning improvement. Thus, indicators of relatively high priority that are also relatively easily achieved are tackled first, gaining quick wins that motivate the team to dig in and work toward the more difficult indicators.

What does a plan look like?
A plan is constructed by setting forth a series of tasks that would logically lead to full implementation of the indicator. For each task, someone is assigned chief responsibility for seeing that it is carried out, and a target date is established for its completion.

What should be considered in creating a plan to fully implement an indicator?
The first question to ask is whether the people to whom the indicator applies are aware that this practice is expected of them. If not, then communicating the expectation might be a first task. A second set of tasks might deal with how the indicator is discussed with the people responsible for it so that they have a good understanding of the expectation. Some professional development may be needed. Check out Indicators in Action™ on the Indistar® website. Then tasks would include methods for gathering the data necessary to know the status of implementation and to determine if additional coaching or training is necessary.

What happens when all the tasks are completed?
When all the tasks leading to full implementation of an indicator are completed, the team re-assesses the indicator. If the team now has data that show the indicator has been achieved, the team provides its succinct evidence. If the data show that the tasks have been completed but the indicator not achieved, the team adds tasks and continues its work toward full implementation.

Can an indicator be "re-assessed"?
Of course. This is a continuous improvement process. If an indicator has been initially assessed as "fully implemented," the team may return to it at any time and change the assessment so that it can plan its implementation. Once an indicator has been assessed as Not Implemented, or Limited Implementation, the team can only change the assessment by completing the tasks (or deleting unnecessary tasks) and then providing evidence of full implementation.

What are coaching comments?
The Coach interfaces with a leadership team in many ways—meeting onsite for consultation, meeting via conference call or webinar, talking individually with the principal and other staff, and sending emails. But coaching comments embedded in the Indistar® system provide a means for documenting key points of advice and congratulation—always with specific reference to the indicator and the team's work. The coaching comments allow the team to respond with its own questions and clarifications, and the dialogue between Coach and team is maintained. This provides a rich tracking of the thinking of the coach and the team, and is useful in future work and in cases where a new Coach or new team members may come on the scene. Also, the Coach periodically conducts a more thorough review, using the Coach's Review feature and examining a variety of reports conveniently provided for the Coach.

What basic expectations guide a Coach's work?
The primary responsibility of the Coach is to see that the Leadership Team meets regularly, with full participation by all members, and candidly addresses the indicators of effective practice. Secondly, the Coach coaches the team to understand the indicators, develop tasks leading to full implementation, and adequately describe their evidence of full implementation. Finally, the Coach reminds the team to submit (electronically through the system) the periodic reports required by the State.

Basic guidelines for the Coach include:

1. **Ensure Effective Teaming**. Know when the Leadership Team is meeting and remind the Principal and Process Manager to prepare and distribute the agenda, worksheets, Wise Ways®, and rubrics (if the State provides rubrics). This may require phone calls and emails as well as coaching comments. Help the Team function as a "professional learning community."
2. **Reinforce the Indistar® Work**. When visiting the school, review the Leadership Team's work by entering the system with the Team and discussing what has been done and what lies ahead. Note upcoming reporting dates. Review Summary Reports and Task Reports.
3. **Leadership**. When visiting the school, meet with the Principal and Process Manager to review Indistar® procedures and the Leadership Team's functioning. Leadership and participation by the principal is essential.
4. **Entry of Work**. Remind the Principal and Process Manager to enter the Leadership Team's work during the Leadership Team meeting or immediately after.
5. **Routine Entry of Coaching Comments**. Enter coaching comments after each Leadership Team meeting and at least twice a month.
6. **Integration of Programs**. Help the Leadership Team integrate other programs and responsibilities within the Indistar® process. Because Indistar® focuses on professional practice rather than programs, it supports implementation of all good programs.

7. **Inclusion and Transparency**. Encourage the school to distribute the Guest Login to all faculty and staff, parents, and school board members and help these groups to understand the meaning of the reports they view. Prepare the Principal and Leadership Team members to explain Indistar® to all stakeholders. Videos, Power Points, and other documents are available in the Resource section of Indistar®.