

# MONITORING

**KEEPING YOUR FINGER ON THE  
PULSE OF SCHOOL IMPROVEMENT**

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**Peggy Hinckley, Ed.D.**

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[peggy.hinckley@gmail.com](mailto:peggy.hinckley@gmail.com).

[www.peggyhinckley.com](http://www.peggyhinckley.com)

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# DEDICATION

To the educators of the MSD of Warren Township, Indianapolis, Indiana, who embraced the Eight Step Continuous Improvement Process, improving the academic achievement for all children and now lead other Indiana educators in this change initiative;

To the MSD of Warren Township Board of Education, who had the courage to demand more from us and hold us accountable;

To Pat Davenport, for teaching us all how to be more effective educators and leaders;

To Katy, Mark, Denise, and Tom, for their loving support and tireless belief in my ability to do the work.



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# FOREWORD

If you are a superintendent, central office administrator, building principal or classroom teacher this is a book that will change the way you think about managing instruction-at the district, school and classroom level.

In my twelve years of teaching the Plan-Do-Check-Act /Eight Step Process to educators across the nation the piece that is often not implemented correctly is the “Check” or Step 8-monitoring.

School teams attend the week- long training on the Eight Step Process, effectively put the continuous improvement model in place but fail to act or check at frequent intervals and are then disappointed that the results do not validate the hard work principals and teachers have invested to raise student performance.

Daily consistent monitoring of whether or not instruction is working is critical to the success of any school or district.

Peggy Hinckley takes the reader through the importance of monitoring in this easy to read, practical book. Dr. Hinckley has lived it in her 32 years of administrative experience and she takes the reader from theory to practice. It makes a great book study for all educators and a road map to insure that hard effort on the part of the superintendent, district administrative staff, principals, teachers and students is reflected in the data.

**Patricia Davenport**

Educational Consultant

Patricia Davenport Consulting, LLC



# CHAPTER ONE

## YOU WANT ME TO DO WHAT?

**HAVE** you ever heard the saying, “People respect what we inspect?” How many times have you, as an educator, participated in training, went back to your classroom or school and tried to implement, ran into problems, and just stopped. The shocking truth—no one ever checked! They just assumed you were implementing with success. Wasted money, time, and no real school improvement.

As school districts struggle with state and federal accountability measures, leadership in those districts identify solutions to their achievement gaps, hopeful that these solutions will produce better student achievement results. The solutions and the rationale behind their selection may not have trickled down to the classroom teacher level, producing the cry, **“You want me to do what?”** And all at once, the mountains of research about why individuals resist change becomes the night stand reading for all administrators.

The failure to address achievement gaps with a viable solution has tremendous ramifications. There is no audience for blaming parents or societal forces that negatively impact our students. But just citing those state or federal ramifications is not enough. We must engage educators to understand the moral implications of failing to close achievement gaps with a solution that makes sense to those educators. Our typical response is to let educators know the training dates, hold

the training, and wish everyone well in implementing. Even if there is an implementation plan, how effectively is it communicated? Most importantly, we fail to monitor the plan, making adjustments based on educator feedback, problem solving based on unique building or district issues, conflict resolution when educators struggle with the change initiative, and providing feedback to the buildings on their proper implementation of the elements of the solution.

Our problem in education is not the lack of solutions. It is the random act of school improvement initiatives with **no monitoring**. Further, we keep adopting solutions year after year, failing to prune those solutions that have not proven their worth. With no monitoring of the solutions, we have no data to determine what has rooted and proven itself in results versus one more program that complicates the teacher day with no results to prove it works. Principals and teachers are weary of this cycle of dysfunction.

The purpose of this book is to change that cycle. First of all, assess the effectiveness of your current school improvement efforts by looking at data for results. Conduct that audit with your principals and teacher leadership. Listen, as painful as it may be, to hear their feedback. Keep those initiatives that are working and have the courage to end those that are ineffective. As you look to fill the holes with a meaningful solution, create an implementation plan and then, most importantly, **create a monitoring plan of how you will trust but verify that the elements of the solution are being implemented properly. Accept that the monitoring will be a commitment for as long as you use the program, not a one year plan.**

W. Edwards Deming believed variation was wasteful. The total quality management movement framed the notion that when you reduce variation in the system, you produce a more consistent result. Monitoring reduces that variation in your change effort so results are consistent.

My own experience in implementing solutions over 28 years as a superintendent taught me that implementation of a solution is not just hard work. It is also a political process that, if not managed well, can destroy your solution. If you do not address the problems that always arise in implementing anything, the problems will destroy the solution.

Educators want to do the right thing, but when their implementation issues cannot be addressed, they fall away from the elements of the solution until it is eventually abandoned. The results we are counting on never materialize. I learned that even after ten years of implementing an eight step continuous improvement process (Davenport, 2006), we found gaps in implementation of the steps that affected results. This was particularly evident when we had weak building level leadership that allowed the adults in the school to fashion the solution to meet adult needs, not those of the students. Without monitoring each and every year for over a decade, we would not have sustained impressive results in student achievement that our educators led that kept us focused on the critical elements of the implementation plan.

Doug Reeves (2011) identified in *Finding Your Leadership Focus* three essential practices - focus, monitoring, and efficacy – that positively influence student achievement.

*We have found three essential clusters of leadership practices that positively impact student achievement: focus, monitoring, and efficacy. By “focus” we mean that leaders identify and monitor no more than six priority instructional initiatives that are linked clearly to specific student needs. By “monitoring” we mean the regular (typically at least once per quarter) systematic observation of adult actions—what teachers and leaders do in order to improve student learning. By “efficacy” we mean the personal conviction of teachers and administrators that their actions are the primary influences on the academic success of students. (pg. 26)*

Given his research, it is clear that the success of any school improvement initiative is **monitoring**.

This book outlines specific monitoring skill sets for all educators engaged in school improvement solutions. These skills are not specific to any one initiative but apply to any change effort a school or district may be implementing. The chapter outlines are as follows:

## ■ Chapter 2—Confronting Adult Comfort Zones vs. Needs of Students

No Child Left Behind (NCLB) has made educational systems move past the traditional averages and confront the brutal truth of subgroup achievement levels. That forced emphasis uncovered a little secret: children of race and ethnicity, poverty, and gender were

not achieving at comparable levels to the averages. And as the change solution addresses the data, it also gets into adult comfort levels. Doing what is in the best interest of the children is now causing conflict with the culture of the way things have always been done.

### ■ Chapter 3 – The “Oprah” Moment: It is Always About Relationships and Influence

When we want others to change their professional practice, we must connect through our relationships with them. Making that connection assumes a past relationship in some way. If there is none, then the leader must take an extraordinary amount of time to visit those classrooms, connect to those educators by listening to their concerns, making the case of why this plan will address those concerns, being willing to make adjustments in the plan if the feedback overwhelmingly dictates a change, and gaining support for the change. Leaders must be a credible source of knowledge on the change effort in their own right because teachers will test that knowledge and expect leaders to pass the test. A leader without this critical knowledge base will influence no one.

### ■ Chapter 4 – Teacher Leadership: The Secret Ingredient

Any change effort must make its case to teachers and teacher leaders, convincing them that the change will pass their test of common sense, making it better for the students they serve. Once teachers are convinced the change will make a difference in improving student achievement and they see the results, teachers will embrace the change, make it a part of their routine, and make adjustments that will further improve the implementation of the change effort. Without teacher support, no change effort will ever root. Teacher leaders must be embraced by the administration, be a part of the refinements in the change process, and lead the charge among their peers for better daily practices.

### ■ Chapter 5 – Monitoring: Troubleshooting, Problem Solving, and Paying Close Attention

Leaders sometimes believe just because they say it, educators

will follow. Leaders must monitor the change by establishing the nonnegotiables of the effort, observing and discussing those nonnegotiables to determine compliance, checking for transfer of the learning of the training to the classroom, and checking for the consistency of classroom implementation within the school. This is the step frequently ignored that becomes the root cause to the downfall of the change effort. Monitoring is not only the responsibility of the building leaders, including teachers, but also the district leaders. They must confront problems with solutions, involving educators. They must confront those who are not compliant with the established nonnegotiable elements of the change and have the difficult conversations. Without this step, the leader is doomed to fail.

### ■ **Chapter 6 – When Trouble Persists: Having the Difficult Conversations**

The easiest role of a leader is being able to say “yes” or affirm the teacher behaviors that support increased student achievement. The most difficult role of a leader is confronting classroom practices and educator attitudes that are outside the elements of the implementation plan for the change effort. Confrontation is unpleasant and assumes a knowledge base that can address the lack of implementation or attitude. But without these conversations, the blockers of the change effort gain momentum because they get away with being noncompliant.

### ■ **Chapter 7 – Student Monitoring of Their Learning**

Teachers complain about the lack of personal responsibility by students for their learning. When teacher decisions are driven by data, students are taught to own their data and assume responsibility for doing whatever the teacher prescribes to correct their learning deficits.

### ■ **Chapter 8 – Celebrations: By the Inch is a Cinch, By the Yard is Too Hard**

Recognition is affirmation of effort in producing positive change and is a motivator to continue the effort. Leaders must celebrate every inch of progress whether it is individual praise or praise focused on the group. When we define the smaller steps within the parameters of the change, we must not only pay attention to those that are not

implementing, but celebrate those who are making strides toward the change effort.

## ■ Chapter 9 – Maintaining Momentum and Building Ownership within the Culture

Once schools and districts gain momentum through successful steps on their way to the change outcome, they must not assume the change effort is rooted. Otherwise, adults will drift back to what is in the best interests of the adults and not in the best interest of children. Their key is building ownership among educators for the change effort. Once they own the data as not good or bad data, but the next teaching decision, they assume ownership and continue to make refinements to improve the change effort, not abandon it. The change effort is now institutionalized as the way educators do their work.

## ■ Chapter 10 – District Leadership vs. Building Leadership: Teamwork!

District leaders, in creating a vision for the change effort, must make certain not only that their principals understand and buy into the change plan, but also have the necessary training to gain confidence in implementing and monitoring the nonnegotiables. District leaders cannot issue the order of a new change effort and then get out of the way with principals. They must work alongside of them, in classrooms, to understand the implementation struggles and have opportunities to dialogue about implementation issues.

These chapters revolve around experiences from educators in the field. While I am not a researcher, many of these practices have been written about by other researchers. I would like to think of my experiences and those of my colleagues as action research – what works from those of us who have lived the life of implementing solutions and sustaining change over time.

I have also included references to the 2011 Educational Leadership Constituents Council (ELCC) Building and District Level Standards as prescribed by the National Policy Board for Educational Administration (2002). If this book is used in a university class, the standards noted at the beginning of each chapter can help to guide the learning.

Each chapter ends with possible scenarios for use in discussions in your school corporation or university classroom. Learning to think on your feet is a key administrative skill. We make hundreds of decisions every day, with many of those on the spot. Further, sometimes what appears to be an issue is not the root cause issue. Rich discussion on the scenarios will build understanding and develop competency in influencing others in the change process.

As you reflect on monitoring your school improvement plan, realize that implementing any change effort requires **courage**. Courage to introduce the change effort, courage to teach others the elements of the change effort, courage to face the doubters, courage to carry on during the stormy recalibration of the school environment, and courage to make the tough decisions. All of the educators in Warren Township had courage to try something different, stay the course through difficult times, and embrace a new way of educating their students through the Eight Step Continuous Improvement Process.

I leave you with the most powerful advice I received from Pat Davenport, who was our teacher in Warren Township with the Eight Steps and has taught the process to thousands of educators across the country. She told me in “year one” that **the first year only happens one time**. Once educators get to the second year, it resembles the behaviors they used in the first year. Everything gets easier.

Never forget as you survive your first year of implementation: fearlessly monitor, cheerlead others, and never compromise what is in the best interests of the children we serve.