

Thompson School District
Systems Alignment
Frequently Asked Questions (FAQs)

What is the purpose of the systems alignment project?

The purpose of systems alignment is to help Thompson School District utilize all resources effectively and to make sure that all district processes are aligned so that we are getting the results we aspire to achieve. The three goals of systems alignment include: improving student success, operating with fiscal responsibility, and maintaining a high quality, highly skilled workforce.

When did the systems alignment process start in TSD?

During the fall of 2008, Dr. Cabrera conducted 100 visits in 100 days. Thirty-seven opportunities were identified by our staff and community members as issues we should consider for improvement. By taking the opportunity to improve a process or a system, TSD will ultimately make a difference in the culture and operations of the organization. The systems alignment process was born. Each of the improvement opportunities identified are being reviewed over the next five (5) years in order to see how they can be improved and linked to each other for improving student success, fiscal responsibility, and improving the quality and skill of our workforce.

How does systems alignment affect student achievement?

Each of our systems improvement projects has a different outcome. Each outcome or result will help TSD focus on what is important. For example, if we identify and prioritize our HR hiring process and adjust the work that principals and supervisors have to do in hiring, we can hire earlier and in a shorter time frame that will allow us to secure the best employees and maintain a competitive advantage over other districts. Having the best employees will provide students the best environment for learning.

Is this process primarily for Learning Services or School Support?

ABSOLUTELY NOT! Systems alignment projects encourage every classroom, every school, every department, and each division to align their work with the district mission, vision, and goals. It also allows a venue to participate and be involved in improvements for TSD. Once everyone is aligning to the goals of the organization, we all move in the same direction and support each other's work. What a great way for your voice to be heard!

How did the original improvement opportunities come into existence?

The original improvement opportunities came into existence by TSD employees and community members who were interviewed during the 100 visits in 100 days by Dr. Cabrera and Arrow Performance Group. The opportunities were discussed by TSD employees, which generated a need for some improvement in TSD.

What process was used to prioritize which opportunities would be selected first?

A systems alignment focus team consisting of counselors, school administrators, district office personnel, purchasing personnel, Thompson Education Association (TEA) and Classified Staff Advisory Council (CSAC) representatives reviewed all of the projects identified as improvement opportunities. They used the “clicker” response system, which allowed instant feedback and reporting of their data. Cabinet members then reviewed the focus teams work and selected the top seven (7) improvement opportunities for project team launch in January.

How were people selected to participate in the project teams?

A call for participants was made over email by the superintendent’s office in December and January. Interested people selected the committee, attended the first work session as a whole group and then met with their project team to begin their meetings. Over sixty (60) people selected to participate on the seven (7) teams.

Do you have to have experience or information about the topic in order to participate in a project team?

NOT AT ALL! If you are interested in any of the improvement opportunity topics that will be reviewed during the semester, you are invited to join the team. The project leaders or Quality Performance Department (QPD) staff will provide you with enough information to get started. Part of the process of working through the project team is doing research on that topic to know what is currently being done in the district, what other organizations do to be creative with their resources, if applicable, and how TSD process can be improved. You will learn a lot, meet new people from all employee groups, and hopefully, find your experience quite rewarding!

What is PDCA and how is it used in TSD?

The PDCA is a variation on an improvement cycle developed in 1939 and used by Deming as a systemic approach to accelerated continuous improvement. The acronym letters PDCA represent Plan-Do-Check-Adjust. Below is a brief definition of what happens during that part of the cycle.

Plan-Develop a plan for improving quality at a process

Do-Execute the plan, first on a small scale

Check-Evaluate feedback to confirm or to adjust the plan

Adjust-Make the plan permanent or study the adjustments

What information is provided to the project team to ensure they are adequately prepared for the task of improving?

Initially, project teams were given an overview of what process work does for an organization. They were also given a brief description of why this topic was indeed identified as an opportunity for improving, i.e., why did TSD employees see a need for change when the information was given to Dr. Cabrera during his 100 days visits. As part of the “Lessons Learned” feedback received from the first round of project team participants, more information was requested so that project leaders would have more of a process mapping foundation. Using the check and adjust of the PDCA (Plan-Do-Check-Adjust), Quality Performance Department staff are making those adjustments in fall 2009 to support the project leaders.

What feedback was gathered after the first round of project teams to see if the process worked?

As part of the Plan-Do-Check-Adjust (PDCA) process, a “Lessons Learned” work session was conducted by the Quality Performance Department (QPD) 6 months after the launch of the project teams. QPD received feedback from about (25) people consisting of: provide project leads training on process mapping, communicate more, more, more, blogs/wiki spaces for all would be great. More information is provided on the “Lessons Learned” work session; check it out on First Class by going to Desktop/District Resources/District Forms/Systems Alignment then click on Lessons Learned file.

How do district employees find out about the work of the project teams?

Each month, Communication and Community Resources publishes an e-news letter on Important News on First Class. Employees can check in the Systems Alignment folder on First Class under District Forms for any additional information. In addition, building principals have updates at their levels meetings or TLT meetings. Support Services Leadership Team receives an update during their monthly meetings and all managers and directors should be able to answer or direct questions to the appropriate project leader. The Quality Performance Department can assist any person who has a question, suggestion, or idea for district improvement. You can reach the QPD office by contacting x6165 or x5010.

How do Financial Services and School Support fit with systems alignment?

Both of these divisions have very important roles in TSD systems alignment! Many times a process or an idea, which surfaces through a project team, has a need for money in order to implement the improvement plan. Financial services has very specific guidelines that are considered when any project or idea is implemented, and therefore are considered at each stage of the process development.

Many people are familiar with the project proposal process. Because a project team concept or idea may need services from facilities or maintenance, or may need to hire additional staff, the Support Services division must be involved in the process design or development.

Some people in TSD are talking about a Malcolm Baldrige Award. What is that award?

In the early and mid-1980s, many industry and government leaders saw that a renewed emphasis on quality was now a must and a necessity for all organizations in an ever-expanding and more-demanding competitive world market. School districts are no exception. The Award was established to promote the awareness of performance excellence as an increasingly important element in competitiveness and was envisioned as a standard of excellence that would help U. S. organizations achieve world-class quality. From the outset, Congress anticipated how applicable the Baldrige concepts would be for organizations including school districts and healthcare industry.

The application process for the Baldrige award is complex. School districts who have completed the process and received site visits report that they gain a lot by going through the application process, including improved alignment of plans and processes, communication, and workforce morale. Experts in the field dedicate over 300 hours of evaluation time, and they provide an extensive feedback report to the applicant.

For more information take a look at: www.nist.gov or google Baldrige for core values, criteria and high performance expectations.

How does TSD systems alignment work relate to the Malcolm Baldrige National Quality Award?

The goal of systems alignment is ultimately to improve student success, maintain a high-quality, highly skilled workforce, and operate with fiscal responsibility. By aligning our systems and processes, we are striving to be a high performing organization. Other high performing organizations have very specific goals and everything they do has a laser focus toward those goals in order to get results. TSD systems alignment projects provide an opportunity to take a good organization to great one and to align our

work to get results that support our vision and mission. As we continually reflect on our performance, it is necessary to get feedback from experts in the field about our work and how we can continually improve our work. At some point in the future by applying for a Baldrige Award, we would gain the feedback that we desire in order to help us be an even better organization than we are today.

What is Colorado Performance Excellence (CPEX)?

Colorado Performance Excellence is a non-profit organization that advises, guides, and counsels organizations that journey toward continuous improvement. The CPEX members are experts in continuous improvement strategies and systems alignment. This state organization provides four (4) levels of feedback to school districts, non-profits, and commercial institutions that seek to achieve their goals. They strive to achieve excellence across Colorado. The levels of feedback applications are listed below. Google Colorado Performance Excellence to check out their website and greater detail about their work.

High Plains Application: Recognition level for organizations that are beginning the continuous improvement journey.

Foothills Application: Feedback for organizations who are developing strategies and approaches to improving their systems.

Timberline Application: Feedback for organizations that have developed various approaches to continuous improvement and are in the early stages of deploying these strategies across the organization.

Peak Application: Feedback for organizations that have fully deployed their approaches across the organization, learn and adjust their processes as they review data. They are fully engaged in a results-driven system and provide a systemic integrated approach to continuous improvement.

How is TSD involved in the work of Colorado Performance Excellence (CPEX)?

The Quality Performance Department works with CPEX to train different TSD leaders in systems alignment strategies and learn more about continuous improvement. A High Plains Application was submitted in June 2009 to seek feedback about the early stages of systems alignment work completed during the 2008-09 school year. Experts from CPEX will be meeting with members of Thompson Leadership Team in early fall 2009 to provide feedback from their review of our systems alignment work processes.

What other school districts have been involved in systems alignment, quality work, CPEX, and Baldrige?

Many school districts across the state are engaged in the journey of continuous improvement by analyzing data, revising their work toward the mission and vision, using a laser focus to closing the achievement gap. Each year more school districts embark on this journey by hiring consultants to support the effort, engage in CPEX applications and strategies, and using quality tools to get results. St. Vrain Valley, Poudre, District 6 in Greeley, Douglas County, District 50 in Westminster, Adams 12 in Thornton, District 20 and 11 in Colorado Springs are a few of the front range school districts who are engaging in continuous improvement strategies.