“The continuation or institutionalization of school improvement needs to be planned. Furthermore, it must be planned as part of the school improvement process rather than thought of as an add-on after the process is underway.

Larry Lezotte and Barbara Jacoby
Sustainable School Reform, 1992

Leverage Point:
- Formal, disciplined structure for continuous improvement
Guide to Improvement Planning

Continuous school improvement requires careful, honest, self-assessment, along with disciplined, thoughtful, planning and attention to an array of legal and programmatic requirements. Thanks to the comprehensive set of AdvancED® ASSIST resources, state-of-the-art system that allows schools to streamline and enhance their efforts to boost student achievement, continuous school improvement has moved into the digital age.

The AdvancED® ASSIST Planning Tools have been designed to provide schools and districts with a continuous improvement platform to be used as a blueprint that addresses identified student learning and system needs. The tools facilitate schools in using data profiles, self-assessments, and other diagnostic tools to identify areas of strength and opportunity. The school’s diagnostic results then feed into the Improvement Plan (IP) to help with goal identification and construction of measurable objectives building a high-quality plan for improvement. Applicable Title I requirements are included to ensure schools are addressing all necessary compliance issues.

The following steps are utilized in the blueprint for strategic plan development and implementation:

- identify GOALS
- construct MEASURABLE OBJECTIVES to define success
- choose STRATEGIES to accomplish objectives
- define ACTIVITIES to carry out strategies
- make ACCOUNTABILITY assignments
- allocate RESOURCES effectively

The end product of this process is the Improvement Plan (IP). An all inclusive Improvement Report, fully aligned with state and federal requirements, will also be generated through the ASSIST planning tools, which will include your school’s vision/mission/belief statement, assurances, and Improvement Plan.

The AdvancED® Standards, Self-Assessment, diagnostic tools, and the Improvement Plan template work together to provide the basis for a systemic approach to school success.

The AdvancED® ASSIST web-enabled planning tools are comprehensive and user-friendly, and provide a seamless process for data transmission and reporting, but the reality is that improvement processes in schools and districts generally happen in an off-line environment. For this reason, AdvancED also provides guides, such as this one, to transform the on-line process for those working offline. This guide will make the connections between the offline and web-enable environment, where the final product will reside.
Steps to Quality Improvement Planning

The Adaptive System of School Improvement Support Tools (ASSIST) offers your institution an exciting opportunity to transform its approach to strategic planning and change. ASSIST is a powerful tool that can help your team systematize its approach to data, assess its areas of strength and opportunity, and develop more effective objectives and activities for the future.

Like any tool, however, the ASSIST planning tools must be used appropriately in order to be effective. This guide is designed to help you understand and work with the ASSIST planning tools to maximize the benefits for your school, staff and community.

1. Before you begin the planning process
   1. Complete the AdvancED® Self-Assessment
   2. Complete the AdvancED® Student Performance Diagnostic
   3. Determine progress on prior year goals
   4. Login to ASSIST and verify your school’s Access Code and password work properly

2. Build an Improvement Plan
   A. Select a targeted area of need
   B. Identify goals
   C. Construct measurable objectives
   D. Choose strategies
   E. Define activities, Assign staff responsibility, and Allocate resources
   F. Add the goals to your plan
   G. View/Share the plan

3. Submit an Improvement Report
   A. Develop a vision/mission/belief statement
   B. Complete required assurances
   C. Submit the Improvement Report

As always, AdvancED staff are available to support your team in its work with ASSIST. If you need assistance with the AdvancED Improvement Planning process please contact Brad Jacobson at bjacobson@advanc-education.org or (888) 413-3669 ext. #5719. If you need technical assistance with the web-enabled ASSIST tools, please contact the AdvancED Helpdesk at helpdesk@advanc-education.org or 888.413.3669, Option 4.
Before You Begin the Planning Process

- Complete the AdvancED Self-Assessment if it is required for your school this cycle.

- Complete the AdvancED Student Performance Diagnostic.

- Determine the progress made on last year’s Improvement Plan.

- Login to ASSIST and verify that your school’s Access Code and password are working. Make sure that your school has two milestones: Begin the Improvement Plan and Submit Improvement Report.

- Organize your School Improvement Team.

Building the “Right” Team

Noted author Jim Collins writes that leaders of great companies "start by getting the right people on the bus, the wrong people off the bus, and the right people in the right seats. And they stick with that discipline—first the people, then the direction—no matter how dire the circumstances."

Building the right team to lead your organizational improvement efforts is critical to ensuring both plan and project success. Not only should these people have the right skills, demeanor and experiences to provide solid team support, but they also should represent the proper constituencies to help garner plan buy-in and success as your organization moves forward.

Your school improvement team should be comprised of a wide cross-section of individuals and stakeholders (e.g., administration, teachers, other staff, students, parents and community stakeholders). The team should be large enough to provide leadership to robust task forces that can tackle each of the Standard areas. Your team should also be seen as leaders, be willing to spend appropriate time on this critical task, and have good inquiry, communication and collaboration skills.
Build an Improvement Plan

Once your School Improvement Team is in place and all the steps have been completed from the **Before You Begin** section. Proceed with the process of building an Improvement Plan that is based on data and constructed using the state approved AdvancED planning template.

Select a specific area of need that must be addressed in your plan

Utilize your AdvancED® Student Performance Diagnostic results, Self-Assessment Findings, Quality Assurance Review (QAR) Required Actions, and prior year School Improvement Plan to identify the specific areas of need that will be addressed in your Improvement Plan.

Once you have identified the areas of need that will be the primary focus of your Improvement Plan, capture them in the AdvancED Improvement Plan Template (Sections 2-6). The information collected here will translate directly into the online ASSIST platform, so be specific. Record each area of need on a new template. Each area of need should include:

- One content area (i.e., English Language Arts)
- Specifics about the target population including: gender and subgroup (i.e., male, Hispanic, free/reduced lunch eligible)
- Grade level to be targeted (i.e., K-3rd Grade)
- Data used to identify this as an area of need (i.e., Reading State Assessment results and formative assessments)
- Specific need statement (i.e., Classroom formative assessment results for the population identified shows an need in reading comprehension and fluency. More than 50% of the students are below grade level in grades K-3rd based on Reading State Assessment results.)

**AdvancED recommends selecting between three and five high-impact goals where improvement is most needed.**

AdvancED Improvement Planning Template

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Goal: 1</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>Area of Need:</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>2</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

Having trouble selecting a specific area of need? Focus your attention on the areas where you can make the greatest impact. Attempting to change everything at once will most likely result in no change at all.
Identify a goal to address each area of need.

The School Improvement Team should write a goal to address each area of need. In most cases, especially in Title I schools, goals should begin with “All students...” As you begin, your goals will be very broad and lofty. Don’t worry about making them specific, targeted or measurable yet. ASSIST will help you refine and shape them properly later. Goals in ASSIST can be “Academic” or “Organizational.” Refer to the **AdvancED Glossary of Terms for Improvement Planning** for a definition of each goal type.

Confused about what a goal should look like? Here are some samples:
- All students at John Hopkins Elementary School will be proficient writers.
- All Hilltop Middle School students will be able to analyze charts and diagrams at their grade level.

Record each goal in your school’s **AdvancED® Improvement Plan Template** (Section 1).

Construct a measurable objective for each goal.

Now that your team has developed three to five goals, it is time to turn them into a practical set of smart, measurable objectives. AdvancED has taken the guess work out of writing a measurable objective. For each goal, fill in the blanks of the following statement to construct a quality measurable objective. The documented area of need should be used to complete the first three blanks.

\[
\text{\underline{WHAT PROPORTION}}\text{ of }\underline{\text{WHOM}}\text{ do }\underline{\text{WHAT}}\text{ by }\underline{\text{WHEN}}\text{ as measured by }\underline{\text{WHAT}}. 
\]

At the conclusion of this process, your team will have transformed all your goals into a series of statements that can now be used to develop strategies for success.

Record each measurable objective in your school’s **AdvancED Improvement Plan Template** (Section 7).
Ensure Buy-in and Support

Part of the job of your school improvement team at this point is to work with all stakeholders to ensure they understand and are comfortable with the improvement goals you have adopted. It is impossible to overstate the importance of effective communication not just among your team members, but beyond the confines of your meeting rooms.

Staff and parents involved in the grade levels and subject areas your team targets for improvement need extra special attention and support through this process. Be ready to engage affected individuals and groups as early as possible.

Choose strategies to accomplish your measurable objective.

This is one of the most challenging aspects of school improvement, but it can also be the most rewarding. The process of deciding HOW to achieve your school's goals and measurable objectives involves sound professional research, high levels of staff collaboration, and draws in the unique skills and talents of everyone at the table. This work offers an opportunity to your team to deepen its knowledge of pedagogy, innovate, and grow as leaders.

The process begins with a discussion about which activities are already demonstrating progress toward your school's measurable objectives. Your team should be sure to review and discuss all available data and evidence to confirm that these approaches are working as well as you have hypothesized.

Your team should then begin researching and exploring alternative and/or supplementary strategies for change. Look for other schools with similar characteristics that have achieved success, and find out what they are doing. Consult your peers, consider site visits, and explore other feedback about the programs and services that are working in other organizations.

It is also essential for your team to locate studies and research in support of the strategies you adopt. Take the time to carefully review all available websites and publications to ensure your team's thinking is sound and carefully supported.

When you have finished your research, your team should have developed a concise strategy statement that describes how the strategy you have identified is going to work to support your measurable objective. The statement should also include a BRIEF summary of how the strategy will be implemented. A sample strategy statement might read, "Teachers in grades 3-5 will complete professional development in differentiated instruction for paragraph structure. Each one will work with an instructional coach to set up classroom structures that support differentiated approaches based on children’s goals, skills and learning preferences." Your strategy statement should be supported by a bibliography of explicitly stated research.

More than one strategy may be used to support a specific goal and measurable objective. ASSIST will support as many as you choose to pursue.
Record each strategy name and description in your school’s *AdvancED Improvement Plan Template* (Section 7).

Define the activities that will be used to carry out the strategies.

With your strategies in hand, your team is now ready to begin bringing the improvement plan to life by defining specific activities, assigning staff and allocating resources. The AdvancED planning tools will help you develop all these activities into a coherent, comprehensive plan of action.

As your team defines the activities that will be implemented, capture them in the *AdvancED Improvement Plan Template* (Sections 9-15). The information collected here will translate directly into the online ASSIST platform, so be specific.

**Each activity should include:**

- **Activity name** – Be brief. This will help identify the activity for reporting purposes.
- **Activity type** (i.e., professional development, instruction support, community engagement, etc.)
- **Activity description** – The description should be comprehensive and include the process for evaluation of the activity.
- **Begin and End dates** – Goals can span multiple years, but activities should have a shorter implementation timeline, typically within a single fiscal year as they are tied to funding.
- **Funding source and amount** – Identify the cost of the activity and what source of funds will be used to pay for it.
- **Staff Responsible** – At least one individual should be accountable for the implementation of each activity.

*The Improvement Plan will provide a breakdown of activities by funding source. This may come in handy during the budgeting process.*

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Great Work! It’s time to put the plan into the web-enable AdvancED® ASSIST platform.

Some schools will choose to work directly in the ASSIST web-enabled platform with their School Improvement Teams and others will complete the “offline” process identified in the previous pages, resulting in a completed Improvement Plan, which can then be transposed into the web-enable ASSIST platform. Either way is fine, as long as a team is thoroughly engaged in the entire process. Regardless if you are logged into ASSIST with your entire team, maybe displaying the screens with an overhead projector, or a single person responsible for transposing the Improvement Plan into ASSIST, the process is exactly the same. Utilize the following steps to build your school’s Improvement Plan.

1. Log in to your school’s account at www.advanc-ed.org. If you can not locate your login/password, please contact your AdvancED/NCA State office.

2. Navigate to ASSIST.
3. You should now be in ASSIST. The ASSIST School Overview screen will display and show your institution’s ASSIST milestones. These milestones organize your Past Due, Upcoming, and Completed tasks. To get started with adding your goals, Click the ‘Click here to Begin’ link for the Begin Improvement Plan milestone.

4. The Improvement Plan overview screen will display. It displays the steps required for completing the Improvement Plan.

   **Step 1 – Create a Goal**
   You will find that the step-by-step ASSIST process is perfectly mapped to the offline process identified in the earlier part of this document. If your team has completed the *AdvancED Improvement Planning Template*, be sure to have it as a reference as you work in ASSIST.
You will then be directed to the ASSIST **Goal Builder**. Navigate through the four step process of:

1. Identifying goals
2. Constructing measurable objectives
3. Choosing strategies
4. Defining activities, Assigning staff responsibility, and Allocating resources

*Remember! Three to five goals is a good number to focus improvement efforts.*

**Guiding questions and drop-down boxes are provided to help with the development of your school’s measurable objectives.**
5. Once all levels of the goal have been completed, the user is directed to the All Goals page. To add more goals, repeat Step 1-CREATE A GOAL above for each goal you want to add.

Once you have added all your school’s goals, select the Improvement Plan from this drop down box to return to the Improvement Planning page.

As goals are added to ASSIST, new Goal Cards are created as a container for the measurable objectives, strategies, and activities that live within that goal. There is no limit to the number of goal cards a school can have.

Your activity description should be thorough, but not too wordy. (1,000 character limit)
Step 2 – Add Goals to the Improvement Plan

Now that you have built all your school’s goals in ASSIST, the next step is to add the goals to your Improvement Plan.

On the Select Goals page, select the goals you want to include in your Improvement Plan and click the save button. Only goals with at least one activity that falls within the place date range will be available to add to the plan.
Step 3 – Submit the Improvement Report

Now that you’ve finished the Improvement Plan, it’s time to complete the Vision/Mission/Belief Statements and the required Assurances in order to submit the Improvement Report. The Improvement Report will be fully aligned with state and federal requirements, and will encompass your school’s vision/mission/belief statement, assurances, and Improvement Plan.

To enter the Vision/Mission/Beliefs statement, click on the ‘Click here to create your Vision/Mission/Belief statement’ link.

Keep in mind there is a 6,000 character limit.
The last step in completing the Improvement Report is your state and federal Assurances. To complete the assurances, click on the ‘Click here to address any assurances’ link on the Improvement Reports page.

The Assurances Summary screen will display the due date and status of required assurances. To complete your assurances, click on the ‘View the assurances’ link to be directed to the Assurances page. To view a printable copy of the assurances, click on the ‘Print a report’ link.

The Assurances page displays each assurance your school is required to certify. The state assurances are required for each school in Wyoming. The federal requirements are required if your school’s Title I status is either school-wide or targeted assistance.

To respond to an assurance, click on the ‘Begin’ link next to the assurance.
The Assurance page will display the assurance name, the assurance definition, response options, a comments box and the ability to upload additional supporting documentation.

The response options are as follows:

- Yes, we certify the above assurance
- No, we do not certify the above assurance at this time
  - If you chose not to certify the assurance, you will be required to provide an explanation in the comments box provided.

Once you have selected your response, click the ‘Save and Submit’ button to complete your assurance. If you want to save your response and come back later to submit it, click the ‘Save’ button. Once you have clicked the ‘Save and Submit’ button, no additional changes can be made to that assurance.

Once all of the Assurances have been completed, the Assurance Tracker will display the status of Submitted.
You are ready to complete the last step! Once all sections of the Improvement Report have been completed, the ‘Submit the completed Improvement Report’ button will be displayed on the Improvement Report page.

Congratulations!
You have completed your school’s requirement for submitting a
### Goal:

Goal: ____________________________

### Area of Need:

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Content Area</th>
<th>Target Population</th>
<th>Grade(s)</th>
<th>Data Used</th>
<th>Need Statement</th>
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<td>5</td>
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### Measurable Objective:

7

### Strategy 1:

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<th>Activity</th>
<th>Activity Type</th>
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<th>End Date</th>
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<td>13</td>
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<td>15</td>
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### Strategy 2:

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<th>Begin Date</th>
<th>End Date</th>
<th>Resource Assigned</th>
<th>Source of Funding</th>
</tr>
</thead>
</table>