

## **Overcoming Obstacles to Adopting and Implementing Evidence-Based Practices**

After you determine which evidence-based practices are a good fit for your school, how do you convince educators in your district to adopt them? Even more challenging, how do you ensure successful implementation? Adopting an educational program or practice almost seems easy in comparison to the hard work of sustained implementation. This brief describes types of barriers educators face in adopting and implementing evidence-based practices and tips for overcoming them.

### **Barriers to Adoption**

Educators may face one or more barriers to adopting evidence-based practices in their schools. These include:

- Money
- Resistance to change
- Buy-in
- Red tape
- Time
- Egos
- Insufficient professional development
- Contracts
- Union
- Cost or availability of training for a program

The following strategies address some of the more common barriers you may encounter in your school.

#### *Addressing the Money Barrier*

Adopting a research-proven program may require first examining how money is being allocated in a school budget, and then making changes. Educators should ask themselves: what can be selectively abandoned in order to adopt the new program? Educators need to budget their money and time with the goal of increasing results. They need to identify what is important to achieving results, and allocate resources accordingly.

#### *Handling Ego Resistance*

Leaders proposing change may encounter ego resistance in the form of staff members who convey, “I know what I’m doing—I’ve been doing it for 20 years,” or “This is the way we do things around here.” An educator “maverick” may do things his or her own way, achieving good results, and also be resistant to change. In both cases, staff members’ egos interfere with ready adoption of change.

The education team of a school needs to operate in a process-based fashion—what’s good for the entire team—rather than in an individual-based fashion that depends on egos. In a process-based organization, if one person leaves—even if that person is a high performer—the team can still perform.

The effective leader striving for a process-based organization elicits the aid of naysayers to help all team members be high performers by implementing evidence-based practices across the board—as a team. The leader may propose that the naysayer give the change a chance for a period of time and see if student achievement improves overall. If the naysayer buys in to the process, that is great. If the naysayer does not, the leader needs to be willing to let go even a star performer in the interest of the team.



### **Barriers to Implementation**

The best evidence-based practices still need implementation with great fidelity to achieve optimum results.

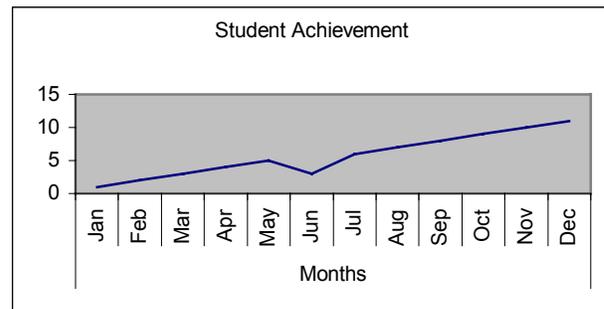
#### *Implementing as a Whole*

Implementation of a research-proven program often requires using all the pieces to replicate results achieved by other school systems. For example, a program may consist of curricula, instructional processes, and staff training. Purchasing only the curricula presents a barrier to successful implementation because the accompanying support structure (professional development and classroom approaches) is missing.

#### *Managing “The Dip”*

The life cycle of positive change usually involves an initial upward trend of improvement, followed by a dip in progress. Without leadership commitment to change, the organization may get into a cycle of adopting and abandoning new approaches when the dip occurs, missing the opportunity to get on track again.

To get a team through the dip, a leader can use these management techniques: (1) provide technical support to staff: continuous coaching and other types of support; (2) provide emotional support: a “we’ll get through this” message; and, (3) “hold the line:” refrain from abandoning change at the first sign of set-back.



**Continuing to implement a proven program past a dip usually results in a renewed upward trend.**

Part of emotional support may involve having staff members write down their concerns about the dip (e.g., new practice takes too much time, work is too hard for the kids). The leader then has the team talk through the concerns and develop strategies for working through challenges.

Ultimately, a school undertaking a move to evidence-based practices needs to accept that things will be messy for a while—but trust in themselves that faithful implementation will ultimately result in improved student achievement.

#### Related Resources:

Hord, Shirley M. et al. Taking Charge of Change. Association for Supervision and Curriculum Development, 1987.

Tichy, Noel M. and Eli B. Cohen. The Leadership Engine: How Winning Companies Build Leaders at Every Level. New York: HarperCollins, 1997.

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