

Change

There is a saying that goes, "If you always do what you have always done, you will always get what you have always gotten."

Unfortunately, this very true statement means that if we are not satisfied with the results we are getting in student learning, then change is necessary. Exactly *what* change, is the subject of much debate. Since so many different adults and agencies share the responsibility for education, changes can be recommended or required for a variety of reasons and with a variety of consequences attached. However, it is interesting that nearly all change is viewed with the *same* skepticism — even though the sources and reasons for change are widely varied!

To be fair, we are all interested in improving student learning. The problem is that we all have a different idea of how best to accomplish this feat. Some change is mandated by agencies that control resources, and the strings to the finances are securely tied to implementation of the plan. These changes leave us very few options and therefore our reaction is often negative.

The other type of change is the result of local decision-making and generally has only local consequences in results and finances. Locally initiated change can be directly tied to *our* students, *our* community, and *our* needs. Change due to local decision-making means we have options. These options include: *why* we need to implement change, *what* change to implement, *who* should implement it, *when* it should be implemented, and *how* the implementation should take place. We determine the target of the change and we have the freedom to determine our intended results. Therefore, logically, we should embrace this type of change rather than have the same skepticism, or other negative reactions that often occur when change is imposed from outside the district.

What gets in the way of positive reactions to change? There are two very important aspects, and they are interrelated. One has to do with research and data — the other with communication. The *reasons* for implementing change must be based on data that can and should be shared. The intended *results* of the change need to be carefully researched as to their likelihood and then clearly communicated. All communication must be focused on why the change will be positive and how the change will improve the current system. The consequences of *not* implementing change should **not** be part of the process of introducing the change or of building consensus to continue to change. In other words, keep the focus on the positive aspects, not the negative.

There are other factors that help keep the response positive when initiating change. On the next page you will find a list of basic steps to keep in mind as you begin any new change process.

Basic Steps for Initiating Change

- Use data to determine and support the need for change
- Include stakeholders in determining what change is necessary, how it should be accomplished, and the research that supports the effort
- Develop a comprehensive plan that includes accountability of stakeholders, timeline, and realistic expectations of improvement
- Communicate the plan as a group of stakeholders to faculty and staff, not as an individual in a position of power
- Implement the plan with clear instructions and expectations
- Communicate regularly with those directly involved, and respond to valid concerns and needs promptly
- Maintain an ongoing evaluation of the status of the plan
- Implement revisions to the plan promptly and judiciously
- Communicate progress to those involved regularly
- Give credit where credit is due for positive results