

# Introduction

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Every organization has factors that are critical to its success. Limiting these factors to a manageable number of key areas will help the organization thrive. Once identified, critical success factors help stakeholders focus on the priorities of the organization, helps them develop measurable goals and create a culture of teamwork.

*“Although the purpose of strategic planning is straightforward, to outline where an organization wants to go and how it’s going to get there by its nature is complex and dynamic.” (Gates, 2010)*

While the concept may seem basic, accurately defining the critical success factors your campus must focus on, determining what the measurable goals will be, and putting evidence-based strategies in place to achieve the goals is more complex. It takes dedication, skillful planning, and a commitment to ongoing assessment of the process to be successful. Our goal in developing this planning resource is to assist your campus with the implementation of strategies required for your students to be successful.

## 1. History

Developing Critical Success Factors (CSFs) has been an effective management tool used in the business community for decades to ensure company objectives are met. The concept is to define tangible, achievable, and measurable CSFs around which decisions are made. Projects are then defined and managed based on the Critical Success Factors.

The concept of Critical Success Factors was first introduced by D. Ronald of McKinsey & Company in 1961 (Daniel, 1961), and later refined and made popular by Jack F. Rockart in 1986. According to Rockart’s definition of Critical Success Factors, they are a “...limited number of areas in which results, if they are satisfactory, will ensure successful...performance of the organizations. They are the few key areas where things must go right for the [organization] to flourish. If results in these areas are not adequate, the organization’s efforts...will be less than desired.” (Rockart, 1979). In 1995 James A. Johnson and Michael Friesen began applying the concept of Critical Success Factors to a variety of sectors besides business, including healthcare and education (Johnson & Friesen, 1995).

## 2. CSFs and Continuous School Improvement

The following success factors are foundational elements within the framework of the Texas Accountability Intervention System developed by TEA and TCDSS. These Critical Success Factors will serve as key focus areas in school improvement planning. It is important to note there is no hard and fast rule for determining the number of Critical Success Factors an educational organization must focus on to be successful. The CSFs documented within these pages are grounded in evidence-based research and have been found to be key elements for implementing improvement efforts.

### 1. Improve Academic Performance

Academic performance is the foundational Critical Success Factor. By ensuring the Critical Success Factors of teacher quality, effective leadership, data driven instructional decisions, productive community and parent involvement, efficient use of learning time, and maintaining a positive school climate, campuses can increase performance for all students.

All of these research-based measures, when taken as a whole, are key to continuous school improvement.

## **2. Increase the Use of Quality Data to Drive Instruction**

The use of quality data to drive instructional decisions can lead to improved student performance (Wayman, 2005); (Wayman, Cho, & Johnston, 2007); (Wohlstetter, Datnow, & Park, 2008). This CSF emphasizes effective uses of multiple sources of disaggregated data. However, it is not necessarily the amount of data utilized, but rather how the information is used (Hamilton, et al., 2009). For example, academic achievement can improve when teachers create regular opportunities to share data with individual students (Black & Williams, 2005). Therefore, it is not only the use of data to drive instructional decision-making that is significant, but also the ongoing communication of data with others that provides the greatest opportunity for data to have a positive impact on student learning outcomes.

## **3. Increase Leadership Effectiveness**

Leadership effectiveness targets the need for leadership on campus to exhibit characteristics and skills known to promote and implement positive educational change. Of the elements proven to have the greatest degree of impact on student achievement, school leadership is second only to classroom instruction. Examples of successful school turnaround efforts without effective leadership are rare (Leithwood, Louis, Anderson, & Wahlstrom, 2004).

*“...each CSF must be thoughtfully developed by stakeholders to ensure the campus initiatives are successful.” (Gates, 2010)*

## **4. Increased Learning Time**

Research promotes a three-pronged approach to Increased Learning Time that includes the following elements: (a) increased academic learning time; (b) increased enrichment activities; (c) and increased teacher collaboration and professional development. Increased learning time necessitates strategies that maximize the number of sustained, engaging instructional minutes, the result of which is “higher academic achievement, especially for disadvantaged students.” (Jez & Wassmer, 2011; Gettinger & Seibert 2002) To be utilized successfully, increased learning time must be applied strategically. Effective strategies include providing a rigorous, well-rounded education that prepares students for college, improving teacher training, improving and aligning the curriculum, reducing distractions, year-round schedules, block scheduling, using the time for teachers to thoroughly analyze and respond to data, and setting aside time to coach and develop teachers in ways that continuously strengthen their instructional practices. (Chalk Board Project, 2008; Kaplan & Chan, 2011)

## **5. Increase Family and Community Engagement**

Family and community engagement calls for increased opportunities for input from parents and the community, as well as the necessity for effective communication and access to community services. Parent, family and community involvement has a direct correlation with academic achievement and school improvement. When school staff, parents, families, and surrounding communities work together to support academic achievement, students tend to earn higher grades, attend school longer and more regularly, and eventually enroll in programs of higher education (Barton, 2003).

## 6. Improve School Climate

The connection between school climate and student achievement has been well established in research. Focusing on the development of a campus' climate as a learning environment is fundamental to improved teacher morale and student achievement (Nomura, 1999). Formally assessing and addressing school climate is essential to any schools' effort toward successful reform, achievement, and making a difference for underprivileged student groups (California P-16 Council, 2008). Indicators of a positive school climate and welcoming learning environment are increased attendance and reduced discipline referrals. Increased attendance in extracurricular activities is another sign that students feel supported by an affirming school climate. (Scales & Leffert, 1999)

## 7. Increase Teacher Quality

Teacher quality focuses on the need to recruit and retain effective teachers while supporting and enhancing the knowledge and skills of current staff with job-embedded professional development. Over two decades of research has demonstrated a clear connection between teacher quality and increased student performance. The evidence shows that low-income students are more likely to benefit from instruction by a highly effective teacher than are their more advantaged peers (Nye, Konstantopoulos, & Hedges, 2004). Students enrolled in successive classes taught by effective teachers show greater gains in student performance than student groups taught by less effective teachers (Sanders & Rivers, 1996). LEAs and campuses can have a direct impact student achievement through the effective implementation of a comprehensive teacher quality program.

These Critical Success Factors reflect behavioral changes that must be demonstrated by students at the campus and district or by adults working on their behalf. The effective implementation of each CSF is crucial in school efforts to meet stated goals and objectives. Critical Success Factors must also be monitored using measurable performance indicators. It is these indicators that will enable campus and district staff to determine whether schools and programs are on track to achieve their desired outcomes.

## 3. Supporting Components

Key strategies establish the foundation for each Critical Success Factor. The activities supporting each CSF must be thoughtfully developed by stakeholders to ensure each campus initiative is successful. The strategies noted here, when implemented correctly, can support the development of each Critical Success Factor. While the following is not a definitive list, the evidence-based components provided here are proven to show a high rate of success, and are the same components, with related strategies, discussed within the chapters of this planning resource.

- **Improve Academic Performance**
  - *Data-driven Instruction*
  - *Curriculum Alignment (Horizontal and Vertical)*
  - *On-going Monitoring of Instruction*
  
- **Increase the Use of Quality Data to Drive Instruction**
  - *Data Disaggregation*
  - *Data-driven Decisions*
  - *On-going Communication*
  
- **Increase Leadership Effectiveness**

- *On-going Job Embedded Professional Development*
- *Operational Flexibility*
- *Resource/Data Utilization*
  
- **Increase Parent/Community Involvement**
  - *Increased Opportunities for Input*
  - *Effective Communication*
  - *Accessible Community Services*
  
- **Increased Learning Time**
  - *Flexible Scheduling*
  - *Instructionally-focused Calendar*
  - *Staff Collaborative Planning*
  
- **Improve School Climate**
  - *Increase Attendance*
  - *Decreased Discipline referrals*
  - *Increased Involvement in Extra/Co-Curricular Activities*
  
- **Increase Teacher Quality**
  - *Instruction/Assessment Design and Implementation*
  - *On-going Job Embedded Professional Development*
  - *Recruitment and Retention Strategies*
  - *Systems for Teacher Evaluation and Feedback*

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