A SIMPLE GUIDE TO DISTRICT INITIATIVE IMPLEMENTATION

8 RULES TO FOLLOW FOR YOUR NEXT DISTRICT-WIDE INITIATIVE ROLLOUT
INTRODUCTION

Let’s be honest; that last district initiative probably didn’t go as well as you had hoped. Don’t worry, you’re not alone.

The truth is, most new initiatives don’t go very well. We see it all the time, working with districts across the country. A new idea comes along, it seems to be the perfect tool for achieving one of your goals, you educate yourself on it, prepare to roll it out, and then…it bombs. Your teachers fight you every step of the way, the students don’t buy in, and it ends up being a waste of time, money, and resources.

So why does this happen so often? Why, when it seems to makes sense, and seems to be a good fit, do district initiatives still fail so often?

Typically, it’s because we made a mistake. Maybe we don’t know we did, and maybe we don’t think we did, but chances are, we did.

This guide will layout nine rules you should follow the next time you roll out a new district-wide initiative. Follow them, and make the next one the one that changes everything.
RULE #1: START SMALL

One of the most common reasons initiatives fail is because administrators (or those helping to support the initiative) cannot properly support it and overcome challenges that are certain to arise.

One of the other most common reasons is that teachers fight change. This doesn’t happen because they don’t want to grow and teach better. It happens because educators have had so many things shoved down their throats their entire career, that it becomes a natural reflex to fight things, because there’s a good chance it won’t be around next year.

Instead of making an already daunting task even more difficult, focus on a small group of your staff. Give them an opportunity to volunteer to pilot the initiative. Not only will this provide them with some choice, but it will also give you the ability to more easily manage the process.

Another critical piece is that this will provide you with real data to share with the rest of your staff. “Yea, but will it work with MY students in MY class?” is no longer a valid push-back, because you’ve already proven that it works in your district with “these kids.”

Not to mention, you’ll be able to work out all the kinks that are unique to your district and your population, on a small scale, instead of a district-wide scale where one minor issues can be catastrophic.
RULE #2: COMMUNICATE THE “WHY”

This is a big one. Teachers have a lot on their plate, and a lot on their minds...all the time. They may shake their heads in approval when you roll out a new plan, but that doesn’t guarantee they understand WHY that new plan is important. Maybe they were so focused on that pile of work sitting on their desk, that they just wanted to get out of there and get back to their classroom.

Take the time to make sure everyone on your staff not only understands why the new initiative is important to their district, but WHY it is important to them and their students. Clear some time on your schedule to meet up with teachers individually and give them a chance to ask additional questions. And then ask them key questions to ensure they are on the same page as you. Most importantly, if they don’t understand, take their concerns seriously and take the time to talk through it with them.
RULE #3: CLEARLY EXPLAIN HOW IT FITS IN

“Oh, great, one more thing we have to do.” You’ve heard this before, I’m sure of it. We hear it all the time when we start working with a district, and we know that it is a huge red flag that needs addressed. If your team feels like a new initiative is “one more thing” you might as well throw it in the trash, it won’t work.

Make sure your teachers can clearly see how the new initiative fits in with all the other initiatives you have in place. Show examples of how they complement each other, walk through how to manage the new plan with the systems and technology you have in place. Spend time with your staff to make sure it all makes sense. Yes, it’s a little more of your very limited time, but when you’re trying to roll something out district-wide, it is time well spent.
RULE #4: SET REALISTIC EXPECTATIONS

Don’t expect every single teacher to have every single piece of a new initiative in place in a week, or a month, or even a year. Depending on what the new initiative is, it can take some time. Remember that your staff has a lot on their plates. They have a lot of work to get done every day, and something new, even when implemented properly, adds to the list.

Take some time with your admin team, and bring in a few teachers, to assess what a realistic expectation is. Then share it with your staff and make sure they agree that it is realistic.

The most important thing is to make sure you actually set some expectations. Too often, something new and exciting starts sweeping the industry and we just want to run with it.

Stop, take a breath, and then be very realistic, and conservative, in your goals.

Play with a few different scenarios, talk with your admin team, bounce ideas off some of your teachers, and set expectations that make sense for your district, your staff, and your students.
RULE #5: CLEARLY COMMUNICATE EXPECTATIONS

Going one step further from #4, make sure that once you set those realistic expectations, they are very clearly communicated with all teachers. I cannot tell you how many times we're in a workshop and get asked, “So, are we expected to have Grid done for the whole year, or just a few of them?”

Unfortunately, we don’t always know what your expectations are. If we’ve been working with your district for a while, we should have a clear understanding of what you’re expecting from your staff, but if we’re just coming in, we won’t have an answer for them. So, it is important to make sure you provide your staff with this information BEFORE you even start to roll out a new initiative.
RULE #6: PROVIDE PROPER AND ADEQUATE TRAINING

We offer a wide array of training options, as do many companies. We also have a clear and realistic idea of what most teachers can accomplish within the time provided during each level of training we offer.

The fact is, most teachers won’t be able to take a 60-90 minute PD session and rock out a new teaching system or software. Some will, but many won’t. And that’s not to mean those who cannot are any less educated, talented, or passionate. It’s simply to state the fact that implementing something new in your classroom requires a certain level of knowledge, and the training you offer your staff should provide that.

Proper training is absolutely critical to the success of ANY new initiative. Research what you’re trying to do, talk with others who have done it, connect with experts on the content, and make sure the training you’re providing your staff is sufficient for the expectations you’re setting for them.
RULE #7: PROVIDE TIME, SUPPORT, AND FOLLOW-UP

Picture this: A teacher attends the training you provided on this new initiative. She is fired up. She's inspired. She's ready to make the changes and make it happen. You've provided clear, realistic expectations, and a proper amount of training. She heads back to work and starts rolling it out. Over the next few weeks, she hits a couple challenges, then a couple more, and then a couple more.

While I know you will be there to support her and answer questions, you've also got a lot on your plate. You can't always be there for every question every teacher has at every second of every day. And that's okay. You'd need to be a superhero to accomplish that.

The problem is, when she hits that one challenge, and she had no one to turn to (because the company that provided you training just gave her a 1-800 number to a support person somewhere across the country), she gets stuck, and she goes back to what she was doing before. Now your initiative fails in her classroom, her colleagues see that failure and assume it will fail in their classrooms, and you just wasted a whole lot of time, money, and energy. And more importantly, another initiative that could've helped your team further their mission, goes away.

It's not her fault. And it's not your fault. The fact is, you need help. You need support.
RULE #7: PROVIDE TIME, SUPPORT, AND FOLLOW-UP (cont)

Find out if the company that provides the training also offers support and follow-up packages. If they do, give it strong consideration. It may be the best money you ever spend.

Training is important, but support and follow-up are the two most commonly overlooked pieces of a new initiative, and they may be the most important.

TIME + SUPPORT + FOLLOW UP = SUCCESS
RULE #8: PROVIDE TRAINING FOR YOUR ADMIN TEAM

A commonly overlooked necessity for any initiative to work is training for your administration team. They may not need the same training as your teachers, but they should absolutely get training on how to support their staff.

Building-level administrators can be the difference between success and failure of any initiative. Understanding how to handle objections, overcome challenges, and knowing what to look for in classrooms, will allow your admin team to support your staff and find solutions to problems before they become too big to fix.

Work with your building principals, assistant principals, team leaders, and intervention specialists to make sure they all receive proper training to provide the support your teachers will need as they take on this new challenge.
THE BOTTOM LINE IS THIS...

Rolling out a new district initiative is hard work. There’s no doubt about that. But it can be done successfully. You can take that new idea and make it work for your schools, but only if you take the time to plan the rollout properly, set realistic and clear expectations, ensure your teachers and admin staff are properly trained, and put in place proper support and follow-up to make sure minor challenges don’t become massive roadblocks.

NEED SOME HELP?

This is what we do. We support districts during initiative implementations. Even if you’re not rolling out one of the systems we train on, we can work with you and your team to prepare a strategic plan for successful implementation, and provide support and follow-up to ensure your time, energy, and resources are not wasted. Contact us to discuss your goals, your specific needs, and let’s see if we can help you make that next initiative the best one yet!