

MIDDLE SCHOOL MATTERS

INSTITUTE



Tools for Establishing a Strong School Leadership Team

Frequently Asked Questions, Overview of Team Roles and Responsibilities, and Checklists



ABOUT THIS TOOL

Establishing a school leadership team is essential to the successful implementation of initiatives designed to increase student achievement. This tool is designed to help school leaders determine appropriate individuals for the Middle School Matters (MSM) School Leadership Team. It is organized into three parts: (a) frequently asked questions about school leadership teams, (b) an overview of team member roles and responsibilities, and (c) checklists to guide the selection of the most appropriate leadership team members.

[Additional resources for school leaders](#) may be found on our website.

Links to resources mentioned in this document can be found in the Quick Links section on page 20.

PART I: FREQUENTLY ASKED QUESTIONS ABOUT SCHOOL LEADERSHIP TEAMS

Why is it important to establish a school leadership team?

Establishing a school leadership team facilitates the successful adoption and implementation of new initiatives, such as the use of research-based practices across a campus. In the case of MSM, team members collaboratively (a) participate in needs assessments, (b) develop specific and relevant goals, (c) draft action steps toward goals, (d) ensure action steps are accomplished, (e) measure progress, and ultimately, (f) determine whether goals have been met and student outcomes have increased. In short, a school leadership team is a group of educators who collaboratively use data to plan and facilitate research-based, school-improvement efforts with the goal of raising student achievement.

What are the benefits of having a school leadership team?

Forming a leadership team has several advantages. First, it creates a culture of collective leadership, which establishes the expectation that all staff members (not just the principal or a handful of individuals) play an active role in decision-making. It allows a principal to delegate tasks to those who possess specific expertise aligned with key initiative areas. This, in turn, fosters motivation, encourages buy-in from staff, and allows for the development of future leaders. Finally, sharing responsibilities among a leadership team promotes sustainability of efforts. In contrast, if all responsibilities remain with a principal, the initiative may become disorganized, delayed, or halted altogether when administrative changes occur (as they often do).

Who should be part of the school leadership team and what roles should they play?

A strong MSM School Leadership Team includes individuals from a variety of positions, including administrators, teachers, instructional coaches, counselors, data coordinators, and others whose knowledge and skills are critical to school improvement efforts. Typically, these individuals assume a few key roles: coordinator, data manager, instructional specialist(s), student support specialist, and community and parent liaison(s). Of course, roles are customized to the initiative being implemented.

In general, team members should possess the following key characteristics:

- A focus on and commitment to improving student outcomes
- Excellent interpersonal skills (e.g., communication, listening, problem solving)
- Readiness for change
- Key knowledge of district efforts, school management, and research-based practices
- A commitment to continuous learning, reflecting on teaching practices, and collaborating with colleagues

Which leadership roles are specific to MSM?

MSM helps schools in three main areas. First, it helps schools adopt research-based practices that improve instruction and learning in all content areas. Second, it helps schools identify students who are disengaging and falling off the path to graduation so they can be provided with appropriate support. Third, it helps schools use data more efficiently by establishing helpful data systems that aid the use of data to make important decisions. A variety of staff members take on the following key leadership roles on the MSM School Leadership Team to develop and implement [strategic action plans](#) for each specific goal they wish to focus on.



MSM Coordinator: Leads and coordinates MSM efforts, delegates duties, leads meetings, tracks goal progress, and serves as the primary contact for MSM staff members. A school administrator (e.g., principal, assistant principal, counselor) often fills this role.



Student Support Facilitator: Coordinates the development of a tiered system of supports that promotes increased attendance and positive behavior for all students. Leads the collection and use of early warning indicator data. A school counselor or social worker often fills this role.



Data Manager: Supports the development of a streamlined data system and the use of data to drive instructional decisions. A school administrator or testing coordinator often fills this role.



Action Plan Manager(s): Comes up with action steps to meet a goal, monitors how well the steps are being followed, and shares progress with the MSM School Leadership Team during meetings. Delegating the management and coordination of specific implementation goals to the most qualified team member is an effective strategy. For instance, if a school develops a goal that involves training teachers to use a new vocabulary strategy, the English language arts department head might be the best person to lead that effort. An instructional coach or lead teacher often fills this role.

How often should school leadership teams meet and what should they discuss at the meetings?

Upon launching a school leadership team, it is best to meet frequently (e.g., biweekly) for the first few months. However, once a team is more established (e.g., after 4 to 5 months), it is best to meet monthly on a regular day (e.g., the first Tuesday of each month). Subgroups (e.g., team members responsible for implementing a specific action plan) may need to conduct additional working meetings.

In general, agendas for regularly scheduled team meetings should be developed with input from all members. Agenda items that should be addressed on a regular basis include updates on each strategic action plan (the status of each action step and how any challenges are being resolved) and an examination of plan-related data (e.g., attendance, behavior, and coursework data; benchmark scores; curriculum-based assessments related to a particular math skill). In addition, team members should have the opportunity to propose additional items related to a particular challenge or success. The MSM Coordinator is responsible for collecting all agenda item proposals, developing the final agenda, and facilitating each meeting.

Should anyone from our district central office be part of the leadership team?

Yes, district support and a district vertical team can be key assets when scaling up research-based practices or launching another new initiative. Soliciting district support and involvement provides schools with information on flexibility (e.g., curriculum, schedules, staff), alignment with existing district initiatives and goals, guidance in data analysis, identification of needs, and available resources outside of the school. Likewise, convening a district vertical team will encourage the use of research-based principles and practices at the elementary and high school levels that ultimately enhance the success of middle grade students.

We do not provide a checklist of qualifications for the district vertical team, but we do recommend that schools be strategic in selecting district involvement to maximize the success of their improvement efforts.

Who should participate in district vertical team meetings?

A district vertical team can be helpful when middle schools use the MSM Field Guide to improve student outcomes. The team can include leaders from feeder elementary schools and the high schools that the middle grade students typically go on to attend. It can also include representatives from the district administration, such as curriculum coordinators, and other leaders, such as an assistant superintendent or superintendent.

What should we focus on at the meetings?

A quarterly meeting provides the opportunity for the MSM Coordinator and other members from the leadership team to share their school improvement efforts and progress in implementing research-proven practices from the MSM Field Guide. Sharing research-based practices that are working at the middle grades will also encourage the use of research-based practices at the elementary and high school levels. The superintendent and other district administrators will have the opportunity to apply what they learn from the school improvement efforts at the middle grades to other reform efforts in the district.

The district vertical team structure provides an opportunity to problem-solve any barriers that using the MSM Field Guide at the district level presents. The school may use an existing vertical team structure for this purpose, or it might make more sense to have special quarterly meetings with this vertical team focused on the use of the MSM Field Guide.

Finally, meetings should provide concrete descriptions of the types of activities elementary students and their parents can look forward to when they move up into the middle grades. The achievement gains and other improved student outcomes (e.g., attendance, behavior) are important information for high schools to have to ensure that students have a rigorous high school program available when they graduate from the middle grades.

How do I assemble my school leadership team and get started?

First, leadership team members must be selected. School leaders may use our checklists to determine the most appropriate individuals.

Second, leadership team members must be invited. It is important that each member be clear about their role and responsibilities. School leaders may find it helpful to present each team member with a handout describing their role and responsibilities.

Third, the purpose of the leadership team should be explained to the entire staff. The MSM Coordinator facilitates a staff meeting to describe the purpose of the team and share the roles and responsibilities of each team member. You may reference the roles and responsibilities described in this document to support your discussion. Emphasis is placed on the importance of the entire staff becoming involved in the school's implementation goals. The process of the needs assessment and the development of the strategic action plans are shared. As communication and collaboration are critical, it's important to describe how the MSM School Leadership Team will use and share information about student progress. Provide time for questions and answers and reiterate the importance of the entire staff's support.

At the first team meeting, it is beneficial to share the purpose of the MSM School Leadership Team and the specific role and responsibilities of each team member (you may provide each member with a handout detailing his or her role and responsibilities). The team will also take one or more of the [MSM self-assessments](#). Self-assessments may require additional meetings depending on time needed for discussion.

Next, team members (or a subgroup of team members) will meet to develop a strategic action plan for each goal on which the team has decided to focus. ***It is highly recommended that no more than three goals be addressed and that these goals be aligned with other ongoing initiatives or campus improvement plans.***

How can I receive additional help while I'm getting started?

If you need additional help, [e-mail us](mailto:msmi-info@meadowscenter.org) at msmi-info@meadowscenter.org or submit a [support request form](#).

PART II: SCHOOL LEADERSHIP TEAM ROLES AND RESPONSIBILITIES

The following pages describe the role and specific responsibilities for each school leadership team member. School leaders may share these descriptions with specific team members to set clear expectations.



The MSM School Leadership Team from Pharr-San Juan-Alamo Independent School District completes an MSM self-assessment in the area of reading.



MIDDLE SCHOOL MATTERS COORDINATOR: ROLE AND RESPONSIBILITIES

The MSM Coordinator leads and coordinates the MSM School Leadership Team and is pivotal to the overall success of the team and the school's efforts. He or she is responsible for understanding the range of resources available through the MSM Institute, leading the school through each phase of the MSM School Implementation Blueprint, and monitoring the progress of the school. Throughout implementation, the MSM Coordinator will lead team meetings and problem-solving processes and act as the primary contact person for MSM staff members.

The MSM Coordinator should possess good working knowledge of the [MSM Field Guide](#). He or she should also skillfully engage with team members and enjoy the loyalty of team members and the support of supervisors. He or she should be organized and efficient so that implementation efforts occur according to established timelines.

Specific responsibilities of the Middle School Matters Coordinator include the following:

- ✓ Act as a primary contact person for MSM staff members
- ✓ Understand the range of resources available through the MSM Institute
- ✓ Lead and coordinate the MSM School Leadership Team
- ✓ Lead the school through each phase of the MSM School Implementation Blueprint
- ✓ Apply knowledge gained from the [MSM Field Guide](#) to facilitate the development of plans to meet implementation goals
- ✓ Monitor the progress of the school using baseline data from [MSM self-assessments](#) and quarterly reviews of data
- ✓ the development of agreed-upon norms of the team
- ✓ Lead team meetings and problem-solving processes
- ✓ Recognize obstacles and assists with the decision-making process
- ✓ Delegate duties



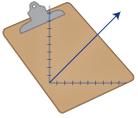
STUDENT SUPPORT FACILITATOR: ROLE AND RESPONSIBILITIES

The Student Support Facilitator builds meaningful and trusting relationships with the most at-risk students, offers and provides support to students and families, and assists students in setting and monitoring specific program goals.

Research documented in the [MSM Field Guide](#) has shown that the support and guidance of a student support advocate, combined with the social, emotional, and behavioral learning strategies taught by campus leaders and teachers, will greatly benefit middle grades students in their attempt to stay on-track, graduate, and become college and career ready. The school counselor or social worker may fill this role most easily. If a school counselor is not available, teachers can share some of this responsibility by allocating time to work with a consistent group of students each week.

Specific responsibilities of the Student Support Facilitator include the following:

- ✓ Assist the Data Manager with the development of an [early warning indicator system](#)
- ✓ Develop a tiered system of interventions that meets the various social, emotional, and behavioral needs of students to increase attendance and positive behavior of all students
- ✓ Use data to assign appropriate interventions to students
- ✓ Ensure that student support interventions and practices align with research, implementation goals, and available resources, and monitor implementation to ensure that interventions are provided with fidelity and that they improve student outcomes
- ✓ Lead schoolwide professional development related to student support interventions (e.g., schoolwide discipline model)
- ✓ Work with community agencies to determine low cost resources available for use during the school day (e.g., tutors, mentors, specialized services for highly at-risk students) and for referral for parents and students for additional support outside of school (e.g., healthcare, nutrition, counseling)
- ✓ Support teachers and school leaders by observing classes and sharing observations about possible antecedents to specific student behavior, by providing alternative management strategies and other nonacademic suggestions to improve student outcomes, and by developing or reinforcing a systematic process for collecting and analyzing student misconduct referrals



DATA MANAGER: ROLE AND RESPONSIBILITIES

The Data Manager possesses a strong understanding of available school data and their potential use in monitoring progress toward implementation goals. The Data Manager provides a systematic way for teachers to use data to inform instructional decisions and a streamlined process for all educators to access the data they need to monitor progress and make decisions.

The Data Manager increases teacher capacity to use data to identify student needs and develop appropriate action plans through, for instance, monthly meetings with teachers to discuss student performance data, identify trends, and consider appropriate responses. By modeling how to use data to gauge progress toward learning goals and make instructional decisions, data managers can help teachers feel more confident in their own abilities as they develop a better appreciation of the value of using data to manage student performance.

In addition to annual achievement data, data should include benchmark or interim assessments, demographic data, attendance and behavior data, course performance data, and perception data from surveys. The Data Manager may need to work with district administration and instructional technology staff to ensure that teachers and the MSM School Leadership Team can access the data.

The [Performance Management content dimension](#), in the MSM Field Guide, provides research-based practices that the Data Manager can use to facilitate effective collection, management, and use of data.

Specific responsibilities of the Data Manager include the following:

- ✓ Use school data to identify and monitor progress towards implementation goals
- ✓ Provide a systematic way for teachers to use data to inform instructional decisions
- ✓ Streamline process for all educators to access the data needed to monitor progress and make decisions
- ✓ Increase teacher capacity to use data to meet the needs of students and support them in reaching their goals
 - ☆ Provide targeted professional development and ongoing data support
 - ☆ Model for teachers how to use data to gauge progress toward learning goals
- ✓ Work with district administration and instructional technology staff to ensure that teachers and the MSM School Leadership Team can access the data



ACTION PLAN MANAGER: ROLE AND RESPONSIBILITIES

The School Leadership Team develops implementation goals and action plans based on self-assessments in one or more content areas. Within each action plan, the MSM School Leadership Team determines the desired student impact, baseline data, and specific action steps. The Action Plan Manager then coordinates the implementation and monitoring of the action plan. Depending on the implementation goal, either an instructional coach or lead teacher typically fulfills this role. For example, a goal and plan centered on increasing students' understanding of mathematical concepts through the use of concrete representations might best be managed by the lead math teacher at the school.

Important: Each strategic action plan should have a different manager to avoid an overload of responsibilities and promote distributive leadership at the school.

Specific responsibilities of the Action Plan Manager include the following:

- ✓ Lead the development of one [strategic action plan](#), detailing action steps (including an individual responsible for each action step), deadlines, and necessary resources
- ✓ Monitor implementation of the plan, noting how well action steps are carried out
 - ☆ Conduct frequent walkthroughs of classrooms and provide feedback to teachers
 - ☆ Collaborate with and support the individual responsible for carrying out each action step
 - ☆ Collect necessary teacher and student data to ensure the plan is leading to increased outcomes and fulfilling the team's goal
 - ☆ Conduct regularly scheduled self-assessments to measure progress (e.g., beginning of the year, middle of the year, end of the year)
- ✓ Share progress of the strategic action plan with the entire MSM School Leadership Team

PART III: CHECKLISTS FOR LEADERSHIP TEAM SELECTION

In addition to their professional judgement, school leaders may use the following checklists to determine the most appropriate individuals for the leadership team.



The MSM School Leadership Team from Lee Middle School in San Angelo Independent School District has a little fun while working on their strategic action plan.



Checklist: Middle School Matters Coordinator

Directions: For each individual considered for MSM Coordinator, indicate the qualities he or she possesses to determine whether he or she is an appropriate fit for the team.

KNOWLEDGE OF RESEARCH-BASED PRACTICES

- Possesses deep understanding of the research base on which the MSM Field Guide was developed
- Understands how the MSM Field Guide is organized (content dimensions, principles, practices) and the intended use of each strategy described in the Field Guide
- Can help design a plan for implementing practices with fidelity, monitoring and measuring fidelity, and providing increased support to educators as needed
- Knows how to solicit additional resources, information, and support from the Middle School Matters Institute

ORGANIZATIONAL AGILITY

- Understands how organizations work
- Knows how to get things done through formal channels and the informal network
- Understands the origin and reasoning behind key policies, practices, and procedures
- Understands the cultures of organizations

DECISION-MAKING SKILLS

- Makes good decisions based on a mixture of analysis, wisdom, experience, and judgment
- Is sought after by others for advice and solutions
- Has an orderly process of decision-making
- Thoroughly questions and considers the nature of the problem

PROBLEM-SOLVING ABILITY

- Learns quickly when faced with new problems
- Is open to change
- Analyzes successes and failures for clues to improvement
- Enjoys the challenge of unfamiliar tasks
- Quickly grasps the essence and underlying structure of things

ABILITY TO SET PRIORITIES

- Spends his or her time and the time of others on what is important
- Can quickly assess what will help or hinder goal achievement
- Eliminates roadblocks
- Creates focus



Checklist: Student Support Facilitator

Directions: For each person considered for Student Support Facilitator, indicate the qualities he or she possesses to determine whether he or she is an appropriate fit for the team.

KNOWLEDGE OF RESEARCH-BASED STUDENT SUPPORT PRACTICES

- Strong knowledge of and experience providing research-based interventions to at-risk students
- Knowledge of adolescent social and emotional development
- Persistent focus on data and data analysis
- Ability to interpret schoolwide “ABC” data (attendance, behavior, coursework) and to plan and implement research-based interventions to respond to data trends
- Ability to develop a tiered system of research-based interventions
- Ability to design intensive interventions for the most severely at-risk students
- Ability to provide in-depth analysis of individual student data so that intensive interventions target the root cause of difficulty

INTERPERSONAL SKILLS

- Excellent communication and interpersonal skills
- Ability to lead and collaborate with a diverse group of professionals around clear goals and expectations
- Ability to successfully manage and lead educators toward completion of shared goals
- Willingness to make decisions that are in the best interest of students
- Proven ability to foster collaboration among school personnel and departments that traditionally work in isolation
- Ability to develop strong relationships with students and their families and to proactively connect with the entire school community, including through home visits to at-risk students and their families and outreach to community-based organizations



Checklist: Data Manager

Directions: For each individual considered Data Manager, indicate the qualities he or she possesses to determine whether he or she is an appropriate fit for the team.

ABILITY TO SUPPORT TEACHERS IN DATA-BASED DECISION MAKING

- Experience using data to drive decision-making in his or her classroom (e.g., developing intervention groups, monitoring student progress, using various grouping strategies to differentiate instruction)
- Ability to create professional development sessions and provide ongoing support and coaching to teachers as they learn to use data to drive decision-making
- Ability to motivate staff at all levels to use data to improve instructional practices and student achievement
- Knowledge of various valid and reliable curriculum-based measurements, progress-monitoring tools, standardized tests, and diagnostic tools across a variety of content areas
- Ability to interpret results from various types of assessments and use those results to facilitate decision-making at the classroom, grade, and school levels

ABILITY TO ACCURATELY COLLECT, MANAGE, AND RETRIEVE DATA

- Working knowledge of data warehouses, student information systems, and early warning indicator systems
- Ability to effectively collaborate with instructional technology specialists and district officials to develop a streamlined data system
- Experience with data collection, reporting, and analysis of program outcomes
- Well-developed written and verbal communication skills



Checklist: Action Plan Manager(s)

Directions: For each individual considered for Action Plan Manager, indicate the qualities he or she possesses to determine whether he or she is an appropriate fit for the team.

KNOWLEDGE OF RESEARCH-BASED INSTRUCTIONAL PRACTICES

- Possesses deep understanding of the research-based practices applicable to the particular strategic action plan he or she is managing
- Can help design a plan for implementing research-based practices with fidelity, monitoring and measuring fidelity, and providing increased support to educators as needed
- Knows how to solicit additional resources, information, and support from the Middle School Matters Institute

INTERPERSONAL SKILLS

- Excellent communication and interpersonal skills
- Ability to lead and collaborate with a diverse group of professionals around clear goals and expectations
- Ability to successfully manage and lead educators toward completion of shared goals
- Willingness to make decisions that are in the best interest of students
- Proven ability to foster collaboration among school personnel and departments that traditionally work in isolation

ORGANIZATIONAL SKILLS

- Ability to identify, analyze, and delegate tasks
- Efficiently identifies and manages timelines to include milestones and due dates
- Remains focused on the goals and makes data-based decisions
- Prepares clear and succinct status reports on projects

QUICK LINKS

Free Support Request Form

<https://greatmiddleschools.org/free-support>

Resources for School Leaders

<https://greatmiddleschools.org/resources/resources-for-school-leaders>

Action Plan Templates

<https://greatmiddleschools.org/resources/action-plan-templates>

Self-Assessments

<https://greatmiddleschools.org/resources/self-assessments>

Field Guide

<https://greatmiddleschools.org/resources/field-guide>

Early Warning Indicator Systems

<https://greatmiddleschools.org/resources/early-warning-indicator-system>

Performance Management Section of the Field Guide

<https://greatmiddleschools.org/download-view/informed-decision-making>

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