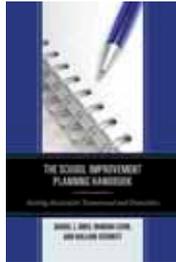


The School Improvement Planning Handbook: Getting Focused for Turnaround and Transition. Daniel L. Duke, Marsha Carr, and William Sterrett. Rowman & Littlefield Education, 2013, 287 pages.

The school improvement process can seem daunting to even the most seasoned administrator. Many school districts are focusing on turning struggling schools toward increased achievement. However, deciding where to start, what to include, and how to address the needs of a school community remains extremely challenging.



So, how should school leaders approach the improvement process and how do we turn schools around? The authors of *The School Improvement Planning Handbook* provide readers with a framework for developing spe-

cific strategies that may pave the way for success.

The authors offer a structured approach to targeting the key elements in a school improvement plan. They note that, “[s]uccessful school improvement plans are not merely the private product of savvy principals. They are the result of a number of carefully executed steps, a good deal of teamwork, and lots of open and honest reflection.”

While the book is much more than a “handbook,” its handbook format makes it very user-friendly. Section one takes the reader through the seven steps of good planning, assists school leaders in finding their focus, and offers suggestions on how to avoid the many pitfalls faced by school improvement planners. Section two uses several scenarios to demonstrate how school leaders can use research-based strategies to focus on challenges in reading, math, school culture, teacher performance, ELL instruction, at-risk students, attendance, and the achievement gap. The third

and final section takes a more in-depth look at comprehensive school reform. The authors provide guidance on effective turnaround planning, sustaining improvement, and reaching the ultimate goal of educational excellence.

The School Improvement Planning Handbook is ideal for principals looking to invigorate the improvement process, or for any school leader interested in developing a “living” school improvement plan. New principals should find the seven-step process described in section one as an excellent guide for structuring a comprehensive plan. The authors intended their book to be “a practical book for practitioners.” Their focus on real-life examples and research-based best practices makes it just that.

Reviewed by Christopher Wooleyhand, principal of Richard Henry Lee Elementary School in Glen Burnie, Maryland, and an adjunct instructor of teacher leadership at McDaniel College.

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