



Schoolwide Guidance

In the fall of 2018, the Montana Office of Public Instruction (OPI) opened a new electronic format for schools to update existing school improvement, Title I, special education, and schoolwide plans or to enter new ones. The electronic version of these program plans was placed under the Continuous School Improvement Plans located on the OPI website at:

<https://apps.opi.mt.gov/CSIP/frmLogin.aspx?ReturnUrl=%2fCSIP%2ffrmDefault.aspx>. It was determined that the schoolwide program plan, along with other required reporting plans (the Continuous School Improvement Plan and Title I Improvement Plan, etc.), should all be placed in one central location.

Federal law requires that all schools operating a schoolwide plan review, evaluate, and revise the plan on a yearly basis. The OPI examined the paper files, and it was determined that most schoolwide plans were outdated and in need of review. The new electronic format will assist schools in this process so they follow federal regulations. Listed below are a series of questions and answers that may assist you in the process of updating your schoolwide plans. This is not an exhaustive list, and further questions can be emailed Zach Hawkins, Federal Programs Director, at Zachariah.Hawkins@mt.gov. New questions will be added to this guidance as necessary.

Q: What is a schoolwide program plan?

A: A schoolwide program is a strategy for implementing comprehensive school change. A schoolwide program permits a high poverty school (40 percent or more of the students on free/reduced lunch) to use funds from Title I, Part A and other federal education program funds and resources with regular and state resources to upgrade the entire educational program of the school in order to raise academic achievement for all the students. Research has shown that for the lowest-achieving students in the highest-poverty schools to meet high standards of performance, the entire instructional program, not just a separate Title I program (or other program), must be substantially improved. A Targeted Assistance Plan is for identified Title I students only. In a schoolwide program, all students are identified as Title I students for reporting purposes, and all teachers are considered Title I teachers. Not all students, however, will receive Title I services. A schoolwide plan allows additional flexibility in the uses of Title I funds. Therefore, an additional plan is needed. Think of the schoolwide program plan as a more detailed Continuous School Improvement Plan (CSIP) or Title I Improvement Plan.

Q: How does my school move from Targeted Assistance to a Schoolwide Program?

A: The first step is for the school to submit a letter to the OPI stating its intention to become a schoolwide program. This letter should list the specific school by name along with its school code. The letter should be signed by the building principal and district authorized representative. This will begin the yearlong planning process required by federal regulation. After the OPI receives the letter, the Title I Unit will open a schoolwide program tab under the CSIP so that data can be entered.

Q: Does it really take one full year to move to a schoolwide program?

A: Federal regulations require a one-year planning period. However, the United States Department of Education (USED) allows states to shorten this time period if certain conditions are met. This means that the school must have a viable and active school improvement planning team which is working on many of the same goals which would be required for a schoolwide program planning team. A school would need to be able to demonstrate that a fully functioning team is in place. This could be in the form of meeting agendas, sign-in sheets, and minutes of meetings that have occurred.

Q: When will the school switch from Target Assistance to Schoolwide Program?

A: The OPI only changes the status of schools during the summer of each year before the district's Egrant application has been approved. There are several reasons for this. The main problem is budgeting. There are two types of budgets, Title I A Basic and Title I A Schoolwide. Monies would have to be transferred from Target Assistance to Schoolwide. Any dollars spent before the switch would have to be left on the Basic side, while the remaining would be moved to Schoolwide. This will cause undue hardship for district clerks/business managers. Districts may also have to set up different budget coding procedures. However, in an emergency, the OPI will allow the switch mid-year, but this will be on a case-by-case basis.

Q: What are the main parts of the schoolwide plan?

A: 1) Conduct a comprehensive needs assessment; 2) identify and commit to specific goals and strategies that address those needs; 3) create a comprehensive plan; and 4) conduct an annual review of the effectiveness of the schoolwide program and revise the plan as necessary.

Q: What are the ten components of the schoolwide plan?

A: 1) The Comprehensive Needs Assessment; 2) School Reform Strategies; 3) Instruction by Highly Qualified Professional Staff; 4) High-Quality and Ongoing Professional Development; 5) Strategies to Attract Highly-Qualified Staff; 6) Strategies to Increase Parental Involvement; 7) Preschool/Other Transition Strategies; 8) Teacher Participation in Making Assessment Decisions; 9) Timely and Additional Assistance to Students Having Difficulty Mastering the Standards; and 10) Coordination and Integration of Federal, State, and Local Programs and Resources. (While this format is not required anymore, these components will assist in the development of the plan.)

Q: How often does the school have to rewrite the plan?

A: Under federal law, a school operating a schoolwide program must review, evaluate, and revise the schoolwide plan annually using a planning team consisting of district and school staff, parents, community members, and, if appropriate, students. The new electronic form will allow for easier review of the program. This does not mean that there will be any wholesale changes made, however. If a plan is working, there may be no revisions or just some minor tweaking taking place. An active schoolwide plan can remain in place for three years. Please note that at the end of a three-year cycle, a school's schoolwide plan will go blank and a full review, evaluation, and revision will be necessary. Schools will still have access to its previous plans for reference.

Q: Who should be on the planning team?

A: A schoolwide planning team should consist of district and school administration, teachers, classified staff, parents, community members, and students, if appropriate. While the OPI understands that it is difficult to get parents and community participation on these planning teams, every effort should be made to include them in this process.

Q: Does our school need to have another team to develop a schoolwide program plan?

A: No. Each school should already have a team that works on the CSIP. This team can easily handle the added workload required to complete a schoolwide program plan. Many of the components of the two plans overlap, although there are no questions that are similar between the two.

Q: When should the school begin work on the updated plan?

A: The school should begin work on the updated plan after the Annual Yearly Progress determinations for the upcoming school year have been made. It is recommended that the schoolwide planning team meet once a month, even though it is not required.

Q: What data do I use to base the school's achievement goals?

A: While the SBAC can be used to base student academic goals, it should not be the only source. Schools should use their own benchmark assessments to determine expected student outcomes. The SBAC is only a snapshot in time of the academic achievement level of a student or student group. Benchmark assessments are taken several times during the course of the year, and they are a much better indicator of student academic growth

Q: Does the school need to make changes to the schoolwide plan every year?

A: No. If the plans are working, then major changes do not need to be made. Normal yearly changes will be in team members, meeting dates, schedules of assessments, types of assessments, data points, and progress toward goals.

Q: How long will a schoolwide plan remain active?

A: Three years is the maximum time allowed. After this time period, the schoolwide program plan will go blank.

Q: Will the school have access to “old” plans?

A: Yes. Schools will be able to review outdated schoolwide program plans.

Q: Why are schools now required to post the schoolwide plan electronically?

A: Under the old system, paper copies were written and sent to the OPI. This made it very difficult for the OPI and schools to keep track of the schoolwide plans. After a review of the paper files, it was found that many schools had not reviewed, evaluated, and revised their schoolwide plans in decades. The OPI contacted a large number of schools, and most of these schools either couldn't find their schoolwide plans or didn't know they existed. This does not fulfill the federal requirement of a yearly update. The new electronic format will make finding schoolwide plans easier since they are stored in one static location, allow for easier updating, and help schools in meeting the requirement of regular revisions of the plans.

Q: What is the comprehensive needs assessment?

A: The purpose of a comprehensive needs assessment is to examine multiple sources of data to identify the most important academic needs within a school. This data assists schools in monitoring and assessing the impact of programs and instruction on student achievement. The analysis of the data can guide in the improvement of the instructional practices within the school. These decisions should be based on data rather than assumptions.

The comprehensive needs assessment focuses on gathering data in five specific areas: student achievement, curriculum and instruction, professional development, parental and community involvement, and school perspective and organization. If possible, the school should develop five subcommittees of the planning team, each focused on gathering data within one of these categories. These subcommittees should evaluate what data will provide the most information concerning the most pressing needs of the school. In order to compare the achievement between subgroups, data should be disaggregated based on gender, race and ethnicity, economically disadvantaged, and limited English proficiency. Data may be examined across multiple years, grade levels, or schools to identify patterns and trends. While it is recommended that a school have these five subcommittees, it is not required. The comprehensive needs assessment should be completed once every three years.

Q: Do I really need parental involvement? What if there is no interest?

A: Federal law requires that schools actively recruit parents for all school improvement planning teams. Many studies have shown that an increase in meaningful parental involvement improves student learning outcomes. Schools, therefore, need to make great efforts to enlist parental involvement in the schoolwide planning team. However, this does not mean that parents will come or be consistent in attending the meetings. As per the Montana Open Meetings Law, all schoolwide planning team sessions must have a posted agenda, sign-in sheets, and minutes must be taken.

Q: How do I save the sections of the schoolwide plan?

A: Each page has two tabs at the bottom labeled “Previous” or “Next”. Clicking on one of these tabs and moving forward or backward in the plan will automatically save information written on the page. If a person enters data on a page, and then exits without clicking on either “Previous” or “Next,” the information will not be saved.

Q: I have entered data on a page and it won't save.

A: There are two possible solutions. The first is to logout and log back in. The second is that there are multiple boxes for entry on the page. You must complete all of the boxes on any given page for data to be saved. If you have tried both of these, and the data still will not save, contact the OPI for assistance.

Q: How do I know that the plan has been completed?

A: After the last page of the electronic plan has been completed districts will automatically be returned to the main page. The grid will show the status of each page. If the plan is completed, the user is notified that the plan has been finished.

Q: How do I access the schoolwide plan?

A: Go to back to the login page, login to the CSIP, and then click on Reports. You can select a district or school level report. Each report contains the complete document