

**MPEA – Standard I PBL  
Superintendent**

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**Standard I PBL**

*A school administrator is an educational leader who promotes the success of all students by facilitating the development, articulation, implementation, and stewardship of a vision of learning that is shared and supported by the school community.*

Key knowledge and performance concepts in Standard II

- learning goals in a pluralistic society
- the principles of developing and implementing strategic plans
- systems theory
- information sources, data collection, and data analysis strategies
- effective communication
- effective consensus-building and negotiation skills
- the vision and mission of the school are effectively communicated to staff, parents, students, and community members
- the vision and mission are communicated through the use of symbols, ceremonies, stories, and similar activities
- the core beliefs of the school vision are modeled for all stakeholders
- the vision is developed with and among stakeholders
- the contributions of school community members to the realization of the vision are recognized and celebrated
- progress toward the vision and mission is communicated to all stakeholders

- the school community is involved in school improvement efforts
- the vision shapes the educational programs, plans, and actions
- an implementation plan is developed in which objectives and strategies to achieve the vision and goals are clearly articulated
- assessment data related to student learning are used to develop the school vision and goals
- relevant demographic data pertaining to students and their families are used in developing the school mission and goals.
- barriers to achieving the vision are identified, clarified, and addressed
- needed resources are sought and obtained to support the implementation of the school mission and goals
- existing resources are used in support of the school vision and goals
- the vision, mission, and implementation plans are regularly monitored, evaluated, and revised

## **Problem I**

### **“The Learning Organization”**

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Scenario:

You have just returned from one of the most exciting and worthwhile National School Board Members Association conferences you have ever attended. On the plane ride back, you reviewed with the board members what you had learned and what the district could use and, to a person, they all agreed that the presentations made by the districts which had committed to building “learning organizations” held the most promise for building the “dream district”.

After a reasonable amount of involvement with a number of stakeholders, you have ascertained that the idea of building a “learning organization” has broad-based support and has generated a certain degree of excitement in the district. This does not surprise you. The district is a solid district with a superior staff. The district has always enjoyed a great deal of success and has shown a proclivity for experimentation with any process that promised to improve or enhance the status of the district. You have now rolled up your sleeves and started to form the approach to becoming a “learning organization”

Your first step was to buy a copy of Peter Senge’s “Fifth Discipline”. The book was mentioned by several districts at the conference as the “bible” for their reform initiatives and the five disciplines detailed in the book made sense to you and the board. The next step was to set up a leadership group to help assist in the upcoming efforts. The group has been assembled and is ready to go. They just want to know what to do.

In talking with the board members the first thing they wanted to find out was “where are we at?” in relationship to being a learning organization. You agreed that this was

the best to tack to take and that has become the main focus of the group. In discussions with the board president, as well as with others involved in the project, you have agreed that the first order of business is to build a common understanding of the five disciplines, construct some sort of assessment tool based upon the ideals of the five discipline and then administer the assessment tool in order to establish a base line for future improvement efforts.

With these thoughts and the “Fifth Discipline” in hand you set about accomplishing the following tasks

**Product Specifications:**

- 1 A district guide to understanding the “learning organization” including:
  - a. A rationale for having a “learning organization”
  - b. Definitions and practical examples for each of Senge’s five disciplines.
  - c. The materials for a thirty-minute PowerPoint workshop based upon the district guide.
  - d. Recommendations for any additional communication strategies.
- 2 Assessment instruments with:
  - a. A minimum of five questions designed to assess the level of each “discipline” within a school setting.
  - b. Different assessment tools for each stakeholder group to be assessed.
  - c. A list of constituencies from which data are to be collected.
- 3 A school profile developed from a field test of the instrument including
  - a. A brief introduction to the field test. (methodology, administration, instrumentation)
  - b. A section for presenting the data collected assessment of each “discipline”
  - c. An analysis of the school setting by each discipline.
  - d. Conclusions/Observations concerning the current level of disciplines in the organization.
  - e. Recommendations for consideration
  - f. Analysis of the field test itself with recommendations.

**Guiding Questions (for use in guiding your thinking):**

- A. Why become a “learning organizations? What is a “learning organization” any way?
- B. What are the hazards surrounding translating essentially a business model to educational settings?
- C. What are the practical definitions and applications of broad concepts like Shared Vision, Team Learning, Systems Thinking, Mental Models, and Personal Mastery?
- D. What is the best way to assess these concepts? Hard data? Perceptual data? Archival data? Other types of data?

- E. What stakeholders should be assessed? Can you leave anybody out? Under what circumstances?
- F. How does one capture the essence of each of the disciplines in an assessment instrument using only five or six questions? Can it be done or should there be more questions? Will people take the time with a lengthy assessment tool? Where are the tradeoffs?
- G. How will the assessment differ from stakeholder group to stakeholder group? Will or should the feedback stay reliable with different assessment instruments?
- H. What kind of school profile would be the most usable for the school? What kind of data should be included? How should the feedback be delivered?
- I. When communicating the purpose of learning organizations what is the best way? Can one document work for all? Should there be more than one document? Which ways are *best for what stakeholder population?*

## Resources

### 1 Texts:

- a. The Fifth Discipline: The Art and Practice of The Learning Organization – Peter Senge. Doubleday Press. New York, New York. 1990. ISBN 0-385-26094-6 (Particularly chapters 1,2,49,10,11 and 12)
- b. The Fifth Discipline Fieldbook – Peter Senge, Art Kleiner, Charlotte Roberts, Richard Ross, Bryan Smith. Doubleday Press. New York, New York. 1994. ISBN 0-385-47256-0
- c. Schools that Learn – Peter Senge, Nelda Cambron-McCabe, Timothy Lucas, Bryan Smith, Janis Dutton, Art Kleiner. Doubleday Press. New York, New York. 2000. ISBN 0-385-49323-1

### 2 Internet Resources:

- a. The George Lucas Foundation – Changing information but a source of numerous articles on parent participation, school reform and school improvement. <http://www.glef.org/>
- b. Successlink – Includes a “best practices” section which addresses conflict resolution, school character development and other programs that might assist in this case. <http://www.successlink.org/>
- c. The Rural School and Community Trust – A non-profit that offers articles and suggestions on community building and numerous other related topics. <http://www.ruraledu.org/>
- d. Pathways to School Improvement – Sponsored by NCREL, Pathways offers articles on critical issues concerning school improvement. Topics include Family-Community, Leadership, and At-risk Students. <http://www.ncrel.org/sdrs/>
- e. The National Clearinghouse for Comprehensive School Reform (NCCSR) - NCCSR is the central gateway to good information on comprehensive school reform. NCCSR collects and disseminates information that builds the capacity of schools to raise the academic achievement of all students. <http://www.goodschools.gwu.edu>

- f. Society for Organizational Learning – Links and resources concerning systems thinking and organizational learning  
<http://www.solonline.org/>

**Key Terms:**

- Organizational Learning Disabilities
- Personal Mastery
- Mental Models
- Systems Thinking
- Team Learning
- Shared Vision
- System Dynamics
- Symptomatic Intervention
- Synergy
- Advocacy
- Discontinuous Change
- Dialogue
- Learning

**Support Materials:**

Any number of articles concerning the book and the concepts are readily available on line at a variety of list servs and e-journals. I recommend a search of EBSCO host, ERIC or similar e-journal search engine. Even using a common internet search engine; I found 20 articles and list serve discussions on “learning organizations” and “systems thinking”.

A contrived school setting could be used but it is best that real schools be used in the field test. Sampling sizes of individual stakeholder groups can be controlled to keep the task manageable and still keep the integrity of the assignment.

### Notes to Instructor:

- 1 The following ISLLC criteria are supported by this problem. You can enhance the students experience by assuring that either appropriate instruction in these areas has been given, or additional resource made available to support student decision-making.
  - a. systems theory
  - b. the principles of developing and implementing strategic plans
  - c. the vision is developed with and among stakeholders
  - d. an implementation plan is developed in which objectives and strategies to achieve the vision and goals are clearly articulated
  - e. the vision, mission, and implementation plans are regularly monitored, evaluated, and revised
  - f. barriers to achieving the vision are identified, clarified, and addressed
  - g. assessment data related to student learning are used to develop the school vision and goals
  - h. the vision and mission are communicated through the use of symbols, ceremonies, stories, and similar activities
- 2 Your best option in using this PBL is to assign it to a predetermined group. It could be done individually but it is a great deal of work for one person. If you believe additional information concerning district demographics is necessary you can have the students review and use their own districts' to set the parameters for the exercise. This will add the element of internal and external politics to the problem. Lastly, you may modify the project to give more or less direction or requirements.
- 3 The students will have to decide up front which school they wish to "field test" the instruments in. It should not be an issue with most school districts to have a project like this conducted in one of their schools but permission is advisable.
- 4 This assignment is best given after at least a preliminary discussion of the five disciplines. An in-depth study of Senge's work is preferable. You could, however, be studying learning organizations in general and give this assignment as one of several alternative "learning organization" paradigms that can be pursued. If this is the case the students may need more time to research the topic before pursuing the activity.
- 5 As written, the project should take 6-9 hours of classroom time over a two-week period.

### Other:

You can have students present their findings to the class as they might at a board meeting. A separate list of criteria for the presentation could be used to assess the students' communication strategies, tact, presentation skills etc. The "board members" (class mates) could give feedback to the presenters on the appropriateness of the presentation.

You could also present a great deal more information on surveying and perceptual data collection and analysis. The more background the students have on assessment issues the more scoring criteria you could add to the project, As written, only minimal expectations are held out for instrumentation and analysis. There is considerable room for growth in this area.

**Critical Needs Areas Addressed:**

- #3 Ensuring all students, especially at-risk, children with special needs and gifted students are successful in school.
- #4 Increasing parental involvement in the education of their children.
- #5 Providing information, which will assist public school administrators and teachers in understanding the process of [site-based] decision making.

<b>Performance Criteria</b>	<b>1</b>	<b>2</b>	<b>3</b>
systems theory	The student demonstrates little understanding of systems thinking	Student defines systems thinking but documentation fails to show processes which support or promote systems thinking	Documentation demonstrates a high level of understanding of systems thinking. Assessment instruments accentuate the concept and reports delivered support the concept of systems thinking throughout the organization.
the principles of developing and implementing strategic plans	The school profile generated does not follow general strategic planning tenets.	The school profile generated organizes data effectively but recommendations are not tied to data or are not substantial	The school profile generated organizes data effectively and the recommendations reflect effective strategic planning processes.
the vision is developed with and among stakeholders	Instrumentation does not reflect inclusion of all stake holders nor do recommendations include reference to inclusion of all stakeholders.	Instrumentation or recommendations reflect inclusion of all stake holders but not both.	Both instrumentation and recommendations reflect inclusion of all stake holders
an implementation plan is developed in which objectives and strategies to achieve the vision and goals are clearly articulated	Recommendations in the school profile do not include objectives or strategies.	Recommendations in the school profile include objectives and strategies.	Recommendations in the school profile include objectives and strategies. Mission/vision is expressly mentioned.

the vision, mission, and implementation plans are regularly monitored, evaluated, and revised	The assessment instrument fails to provide data that is useful in revising school process to meet expectations of a learning organization.	The assessment instrument provides adequate data that is useful in revising school process to meet expectations of a learning organization.	The assessment instrument provides data that is not only useful in revising school process to meet expectations of a learning organization, but provides opportunity for discontinuous change.
barriers to achieving the vision are identified, clarified, and addressed	The assessment instrument fails to provide data that identifies barriers to a learning organization.	The assessment instrument provides reasonable data that identifies barriers to a learning organization.	The assessment instrument and recommendations in the school profile data that effectively identifies barriers to a learning organization.
assessment data related to student learning are used to develop the school vision and goals	Instrumentation, recommendations and analysis fail to include reference to student learning,	Recommendations or analysis include reference to improved student learning but indirectly	Student learning is at the heart of data gathering, analysis and recommendations.
the vision and mission are communicated through the use of symbols, ceremonies, stories, and similar activities	District guide does not adequately communicate the connection between proposed processes and district goals	District guide adequately communicates the connection between proposed processes and district goals	Specific mention of supporting school vision, mission, goals, etc. are included in all communication materials generated.

### Pilot Test Information

<p>“The Learning Organization” Class</p>				
Question	Very Helpful	Helpful	Somewhat helpful	Not Helpful
1	8	7	2	0
2	9	6	2	0

3	6	10	1	0
	Highly effective	Effective	Somewhat effective	Not effective
4	7	7	3	0
5	Comments: <ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>As long as the problem imitates real-life they help me to understand the application of standards.</li> <li>Hands-on is good</li> <li>Resources and Key Terms really helped me..</li> </ul>			
6	Comments: <ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>Very Comprehensive</li> <li>Good exercise.</li> <li>Spelling and Grammar check.</li> </ul>			

<p>“The Learning Organization” Instructor</p>				
Question	Very Helpful	Helpful	Somewhat helpful	Not Helpful
1	1			
2		1		
3	1			
	Highly effective	Effective	Somewhat effective	Not effective
4		1		
5	Comments: <ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>Good exercise, one that probably should be happening. Some of the students saw it as “academic” but they often see the superintendency in terms of pencil-pushing and not visionary. Personally as a superintendent, this is the type of work that I loved to do: create environments and culture. All ISLLC goals seemed relevant to me but with ISLLC it’s always difficult to tell. For sure the systems thinking goal was really stressed.</li> </ul>			

6	<p>Comments:</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>Some students wanted more information on Senge's work. Since I was field-testing this in a class where we do general culture and organizational issues I didn't go over the material in much detail. I don't usually do Senge. If I had done so the assignment would have been received with a bit more understanding. Students thought the activity was fine though they have never seen a superintendent or assistant superintendent work on topics like this before. I think they will use some of these skills again in their jobs someday and maybe appreciate the assignment more. In general all the students enjoyed the experience.</li> </ul>

Author Notes:

I did not get too much feedback that led to any changes in the scenario. Most of the students and the instructor remarks dealt with grammar and spelling. As it was a rough draft that I gave them to work with this was expected. I have gone through the document and corrected most of the grammatical and spelling issues. I am sure they may be a few more but I and the proofreader didn't find them.

Senge's work is important to this activity. While this class may not use this activity due to the Senge emphasis. It will become a standard activity in the department next semester in another course which specifically uses Senge.