

As teams work to develop recommendations that fit the school, it is very easy to overstep their authority. This often happens by being too prescriptive. Sometimes, the team is simply trying to make a suggestion based on their own experience and it comes across as telling the school to solve the problem in a certain way. Here are three examples with poorly worded recommendations and then well-written recommendations immediately following.

A. Too Prescriptive:

Develop more regular communication procedures regarding assessment and student achievement with online programs such as RenWeb and ACSI's DataOnline as well as weekly newsletters in the elementary school. (Indicator 5.9)

Parents have indicated that they are unhappy with the current out-of-date online grading program the school is using. Parents feel that teachers don't care and they don't know what to do about it. They want weekly newsletters for elementary and up-to-date grades online for secondary students. The school has indicated that it is open to considering other options but it has not budgeted for an upgrade at this time. (Parent and staff interviews, budget review, survey results)

Well-written:

Develop regular communication regarding assessment and student achievement. Both formative and summative assessments can be utilized to assure that parents receive information in a timely fashion. (Indicator 5.9)

Parents have indicated that they are not pleased with the current level of communication regarding grading and assessment results for their students. Little is sent home to parents in the way of assessment results and grades are typically not posted nor up-to-date. The school has indicated that it is open to considering other options but it has not decided on any new alternatives at this point. (Parent and staff interviews, budget review, survey results)

Explanation:

The statement in A. describes the problem but immediately moves to a prescriptive way to solve that problem. It mentions a couple of online programs for grading and assessment results for parents. While these are listed as examples, they do not belong in the statement. Mention them verbally only. In the well-written example, notice that the wording sticks as closely as possible to the indicator and the wording found in the compliance level of the rubric. As is evident in the well-written example, more general wording is preferred. It is up to the school how they provide the student achievement and assessment information. The visiting team gets too prescriptive when they tell the school to use an online grading program and newsletters, even if the school has shown some interest in going that direction.

B. Too Prescriptive

Develop plans and create a funding mechanism for a new fine arts building to accommodate the growing fine arts program at XYZ School. (Indicator 6.13)

The current building that houses fine arts is not at the level necessary to draw the clientele that XYZ wants to draw. In order to be known as a school that excels in the fine arts, XYZ School needs a new fine arts building. A capital campaign will need to be started in order to provide funding. (Parent survey, interviews with administration, self-study)

Well-written

Facilitate a discussion with all stakeholders seeking consensus on a preferred vision for the future regarding the possibilities and implications of a new facility, anticipated school growth, and the related financial implications.

While there is general support among the parents and the administration that a new fine arts building is appropriate for the growth of the school, it is recommended that the school board and administration enter into a multi-year planning process which includes a discussion of new facilities. Conversations regarding the future of the school should allow for stakeholders to verbalize their understanding of the commitments involved, short and long range priorities, and support for the process. (Parent survey, interviews with administration)

Explanation:

The statement in B. may go along with a certain group of parents and even administrators in their desire to build a fine arts building. It may even be in the self-study. Some administrators like to “use” the visiting team to advance their agenda to get a certain recommendation into the report hoping that the board will then move in that direction. However, it is NOT appropriate to add something like this which is not in the standard or indicator. The well-written recommendation recognizes that there is an issue of competing needs or desires and so rightly suggests that the school should evaluate the short and long-term goals in a strategic planning process (which is required of the school anyway) and specifically asks for the school, including the school board, to include the views of all stakeholders.

C. Too prescriptive

Improve the ongoing supervision and evaluation of staff by developing an annual evaluation system that provides for ongoing feedback, is well documented, includes peer review and input from stakeholders, and is linked to collaboratively developed professional development goals. (Indicator 4.9)

The current system of teacher evaluation is hit and miss with many teachers going several years between evaluations. Some departments have an internal evaluation system and others have no system at all. Teachers express this as a concern and even teachers feel that the lack of evaluations signify a lack of interest in what happens in the classroom. (teacher and administrator interviews, self-study ____, review of the personnel files)

Well-written

Leadership develops and implements a clearly defined plan for ongoing evaluation of faculty and staff which includes annual written observations and goal setting to more effectively encourage professional development and achieve desired student outcomes. (Indicator 4.9)

The current system of teacher evaluation has been inconsistent with many teachers going several years between evaluations. While there have been some efforts in some departments, teachers express the desire

to have evaluations become a stronger part of their regular professional development plan. (teacher and administrator interviews, self-study ____, review of the personnel files)

Explanation

The issue in statement C. is much more subtle. On the surface, it looks fine. However, when compared to the rubric, it matches only the “Exceeds Compliance” level. Note that the well-written recommendation is written more closely to resemble the “Compliance” level or the indicator itself.