

Catalyzing School Improvement Through Self-Evaluation

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Abstract:

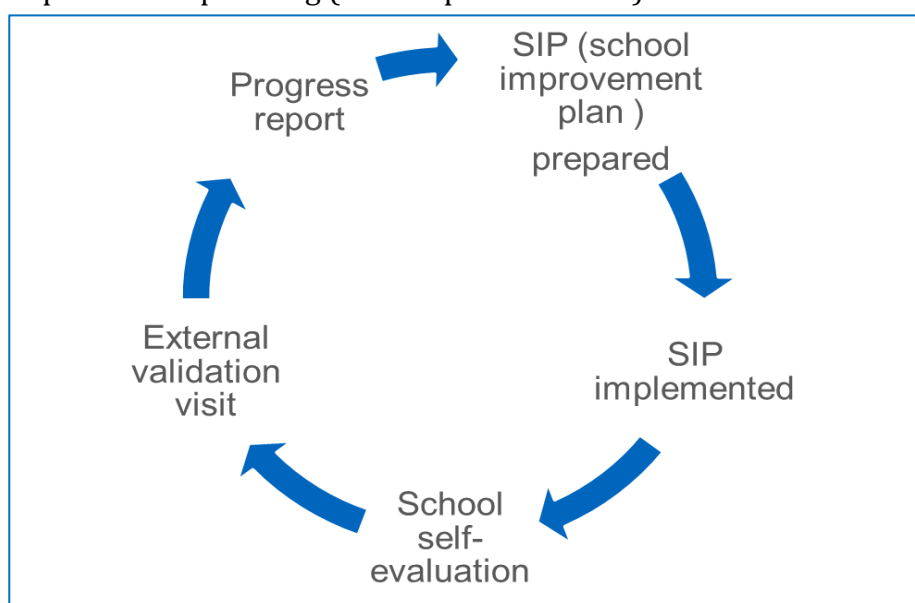
School self-evaluation is a powerful tool which members in a school can use to bring changes within a system. Each individual at school becomes part of the process and accountability plays a vital part in it.

Nazarbayev Intellectual Schools (NIS), an autonomous educational organization, in collaboration with the Cambridge International Examinations, has for the first time piloted the project of self-evaluation among 6 Nazarbayev Intellectual schools. The value of this project lies within one of the NIS strategic goals, transmission of experience to the secondary schools where the culture of self-evaluation shall be established within the cycle of school improvement planning.

In this article we would like to present the results gained of the first year experience and lessons learnt and our plans for the future years.

Introduction

School self-evaluation is a fundamental force in achieving school improvement, therefore there is a need to establish a culture of self-evaluation within the annual cycle of school improvement planning (see the picture below).



Picture: Typical cycle of school improvement planning (Cambridge International Examinations)

The experience of Nazarbayev Intellectual Schools

Nazarbayev Intellectual Schools is designated with a leading educational reform through the creation of a new type of schooling where selected students are being prepared for the challenges arising in the 21st century. One of the organization goals is to implement the best international practices and to transmit the experience into the secondary schools of Kazakhstan. One of the projects that Nazarbayev Intellectual Schools has piloted is the project on self-evaluation among the selected six Nazarbayev Intellectual schools, and now this project will be transmitted into the secondary education system of Kazakhstan.

The project on school evaluation was done in joint collaboration with the Cambridge International Examinations and the process was composed of the following procedures being divided into two important and separate stages:

First stage

The first stage is described as the preparation stage of the selected Nazarbayev Intellectual Schools to implement a self-evaluation and school improvement process and it was composed of the following procedures:

1. The initial point of the project was agreeing upon a set of standards that were in line with those used by international accrediting organizations and adopted for the specific context against which the selected Nazarbayev Intellectual Schools were evaluated. There are nine standards which cover each aspect of the school life, and they can be described as school reviewing its practice towards the core values and its implementation throughout the school; leading and managing the school; curriculum's compliance with the needs of the students; relationship among teaching, learning and student outcomes; achievement of the student outcomes; contribution of the students to the school life and community; importance of the professional development.

2. The next step that the schools underwent on their preparation path was a completion of the self-evaluation process. This process was described by the school representatives as a process of helping schools to identify areas for improvement and to be further coordinated by school themselves, to be managed and improved through the school improvement planning. The self-evaluation process was conducted for the seven month period, during which the special committees and groups were created for monitoring and reviewing the completion of the self-evaluation form.

3. After the schools finalized their self-evaluation forms, they were sent for the external review.

4. The international experts from the Cambridge International Examinations conducted the validation visit to the schools. During the validation visits, the international experts:

- observed the self-evaluation form completed by the school, and evidence gathered for the support of the school achievements in compliance with the given standards;
- met with the school administration, members of the committees and groups as well as teachers, students and parents;
- observed a number of lessons;

The validation visits were conducted to confirm that the school self-evaluation forms were managed effectively and their interpretation was in line with expectations.

5. After the conduction of the validation visits, each school was provided with the comprehensive reports with the feedback according to each standard and with overall areas needed for improvement and strong points as well.

6. The above mentioned steps are all part of the annual cycle of school improvement planning. Receiving the reports with identified areas for improvement and strong points, schools started to work on their school improvement plans.

7. The next step that the schools are working on according to the cycle is identifying priorities for improvement and putting them down into the school improvement plan.

A cohort of schools was prepared at the first stage to apply for the international accreditation.

Lessons learnt from the first stage

Lessons learnt from the self-evaluation process include strong points about the schools, and the areas which need to be further improved. The school administration was committed towards the self-evaluation process. The scheme of the work organization and documentation on lesson planning, observation reports give necessary information for the reinforcement of the evidence data in compliance with each standard linked to subject programs, resources, teaching and learning. The teaching staff has an ongoing aspiration towards the professional development and innovations. The schools would need to work on making analysis of gathered data in the evidence. The self-evaluation process also raises the importance of accountability at each school level, if talking about teachers, then them holding them to account through their work evaluation, monitoring practice and performance, and stakeholders as well through the work of the completion of the self-evaluation forms. Self-evaluation provides the schools with the opportunity for professional dialogue within the school and collaborative improvement to build on previous achievements. From the self-evaluation schools were able to identify priorities for improvement and using these to produce school development plans.

Second stage

The first cohort of schools is currently ready to move on to the second stage, applying for the international accreditation. Nazarbayev Intellectual Schools is in the process of looking into the several international organizations for starting to work with.

Since there is a network of Intellectual Schools where currently fifteen schools are part of, therefore, the next selected cohort of schools will be going through the first stage and repeating the procedures done by the first cohort. The cycle of procedures will be repeated by the next cohorts.

Plans for the future year

The project of self-evaluation among Nazarbayev Intellectual schools has for the first time piloted in the education system which was successful. Nazarbayev Intellectual Schools is planning to share the advantages of the self-evaluation process with the secondary schools of Kazakhstan.

Conclusion

The procedures described above, such as self-evaluation, validation visits, and improvement planning, are used as an assessment tool for the school improvement. The school self-evaluation brings school administration and staff together, each individual becomes part of

the process, where accountability starts to play a vital part. Not only self-evaluation plays the role of the team-building process, but also schools identify areas for improvement. School self-evaluation becomes therefore a driving force of bringing in changes within the system. Self-evaluation is the catalyzer of the changes within a system towards a strategic planning of the school system and for the sustainable growth.

References:

1. Cambridge International Examinations, 2013. Presentation on *School self-evaluation*.