



District
Management
Group

10 MISTAKES TO AVOID

Innovating with Impact

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10 Mistakes to Avoid

Innovating with Impact

Innovating is exciting, but ensuring that innovations are introduced and rolled out so that they have significant and lasting impact is challenging work. These 10 lessons may help guide the way.

1 Don't let success stand in the way of making bold improvements.

Success can be the enemy of innovation. Fear of tampering with success can prevent a district from piloting new ideas that could be beneficial to students.

2 Don't assume that innovation must apply to all students.

Districts often focus on those innovations that apply to all students to the exclusion of more modest innovations that can have meaningful impact for targeted groups of students.

3 Don't forget to clearly articulate the problem to be solved.

Ensure that the district has a clear understanding of the problem it is trying to solve, and has identified the root causes of the problem. For example, saying that an initiative is addressing the dropout rate is not sufficient; it must be addressing key root causes of the dropout rate.

4 Don't forget the supporting ecosystem.

In planning for implementation, it is important to ensure that schedules, policies, and infrastructure are aligned to support—or at least not derail—the implementation of the innovation.

Don't underestimate the challenge to identity.

The adoption of an innovation can seem threatening to people's sense of self. Efforts need to be made to prepare people in the organization for these changes and for their modified role.

Don't neglect to cultivate the necessary skills.

Communicating the changes and providing adequate training are essential to smooth implementation of an innovation.

Don't let innovation be a side job.

Spearheading innovation requires time and commitment. Successful innovations might be initiated or championed by the superintendent, but a hands-on leader is needed to successfully implement an innovation. This effort cannot be tacked on to someone's existing job.

Don't forget the importance of building support.

Often, principals and central office staff are charged with implementing an innovation that they themselves do not fully understand or support. For an innovation to take root, those leading the effort must be strong supporters, and they, in turn, must actively cultivate support.

Don't forget to define the rollout strategy.

Be proactive in defining whether the implementation will be localized or on a system-wide level and whether it will be implemented at a slow or fast pace. Defining the rollout makes the mission clear to those involved and reduces anxiety and uncertainty for others.

Don't assume that innovation will succeed without continuous support.

For an innovation to gain traction and succeed, leadership must protect, support, and nurture the initiative throughout the adoption cycle. Creating a team to spearhead the innovation is an important step, but visible and continued support from leadership is essential to long-term success.