

- ◆ *Where they want to be*, by creating or revisiting the vision and placing it at the center of everything they do; and
- ◆ *How they are going to get to the vision*, through short-term and long-term plans.

Note that the elements of Plan-Do-Study-Adjust (PDSA) are not equally distributed in reality. PLANNING takes up half of the cycle—more than the traditional cycle implies. There is a lot to do before implementation can begin.

Schools IMPLEMENT the vision using leadership structures, professional learning, and partnerships. They EVALUATE programs, processes, and the vision to know if what they are doing is making a difference. Then, they adjust and IMPROVE by continuing to do the things that are making a difference and stop doing the things that are not making a difference. And the cycle repeats.

By starting and ending with the gaps, schools miss the opportunities to innovate, rethink, and improve their systems.

By starting with comprehensive data analysis, schools see how they are getting their current results.

The Education for the Future Continuous Improvement Continuums (CICs) appear in Appendix A with complete instructions on how to use them, and help school staff know where their learning organizations are and what they need to do next with respect to continuous school improvement.

FROM COMPLIANCE TO CONTINUOUS SCHOOL IMPROVEMENT

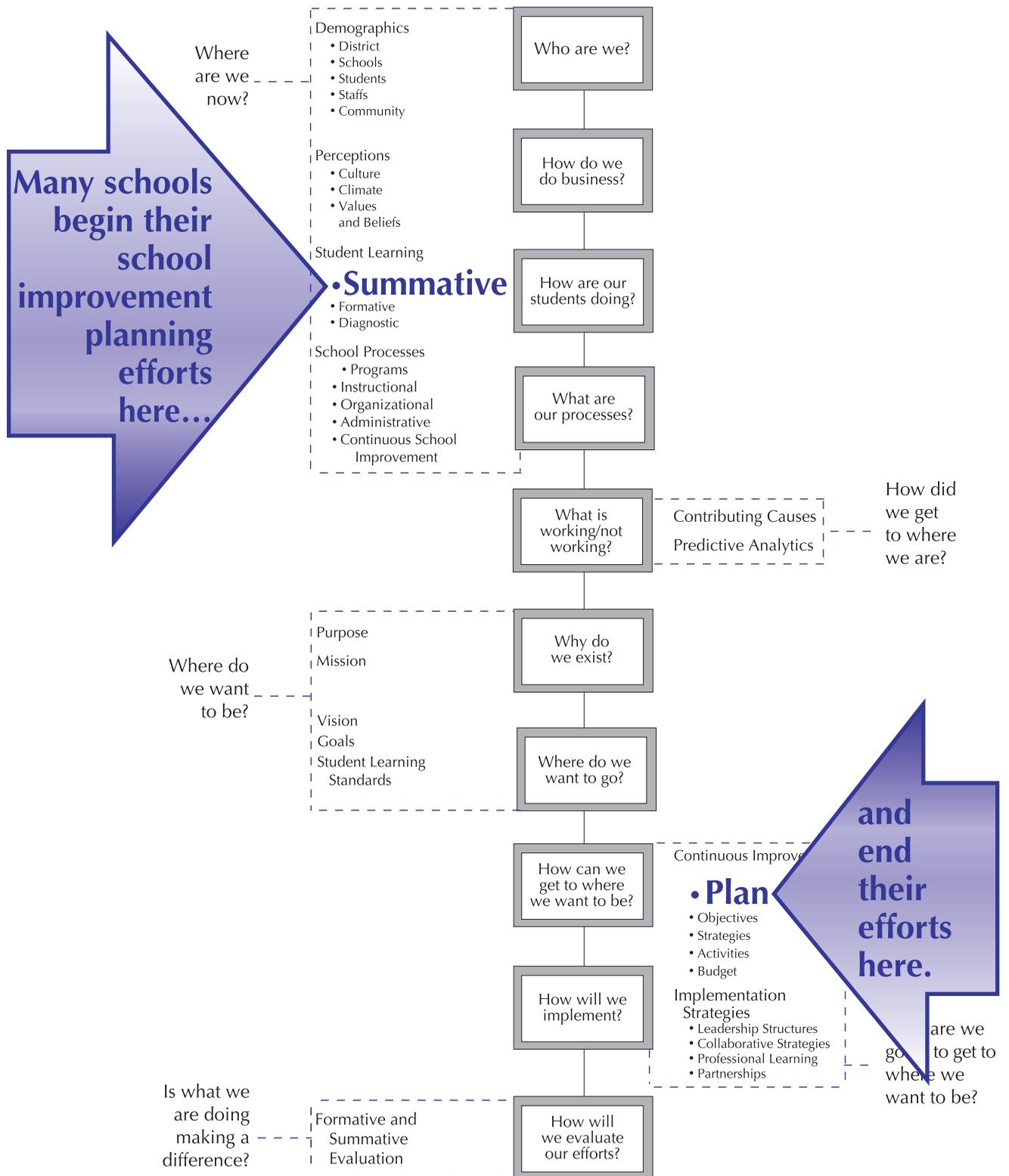
The framework for continuous school improvement shown in Figure 2.1 sounds so simple and logical, most schools think they are already doing it. However, many schools skip the first three components of the continuous school improvement framework and begin their school improvement plans by looking at the gaps between where they are now and where they want to be with respect to summative student learning results, only. While these data provide valuable information, starting here does not give schools a complete picture. By starting and ending with the gaps, schools miss the opportunities to innovate, rethink, and improve their systems. By starting and ending with the summative testing gaps, schools tend to add interventions to “fix the kids.” By starting with comprehensive data analysis, schools see how they are getting their current results. Then, with their vision, they can determine what *they* need to do to get different results for *all* students.

Figure 2.4 repeats the framework for continuous school improvement (previously seen in Figure 2.1), pointing out where schools too often begin and end their school improvement efforts. This is what complying to solely close gaps looks like.

ASSESSING CONTINUOUS SCHOOL IMPROVEMENT WITH THE EDUCATION FOR THE FUTURE CONTINUOUS IMPROVEMENT CONTINUUMS

A tool we use to help schools reflect on where they are with continuous school improvement are the *Education for the Future Continuous Improvement Continuums* (CICs). Appearing in Appendix A, with complete instructions on how to use them, the *Continuums* help school staff know where their learning organizations are and what they need to do next with respect to continuous school improvement. The

Figure 2.4
CONTINUOUS SCHOOL IMPROVEMENT FRAMEWORK—WITH FOCUS ON COMPLIANCE



Continuous Improvement Continuums, adapted from the *Malcolm Baldrige Award Program for Quality Business Management*, provide an authentic means for measuring schoolwide improvement and growth. Schools use these Continuums as a vehicle for ongoing self-assessment. They use the results of the assessment to acknowledge their accomplishments, to set goals for improvement, and to keep school districts and partners apprised of the progress they have made in their continuous school improvement efforts.

The *Continuous Improvement Continuums* are self-assessment tools that measure, on a one-to-five scale, where the school is with respect to its *approach, implementation, and outcome* for seven continuous improvement categories that are congruent with the components of the continuous school improvement framework. Those seven categories are Information and Analysis, Student Achievement, Quality Planning, Professional Learning, Leadership, Partnership Development, and Continuous Improvement and Evaluation.

Figure 2.5 shows the first in the series of seven, *Information and Analysis Continuum*, with descriptions of each of the five levels, summarized below.

- ◆ A “one” rating, located at the left of each *Continuum*, represents a school that has not yet begun to improve. Decisions are reactive.
 - ◆ A “two” rating implies that there are some good things going on in some places in the school, some of the time. Decisions are usually made on a problem-solving basis—when they are required.
 - ◆ A “three” rating indicates that there is a system in place to do the work of the *Continuum*. There is also a system for making decisions.
 - ◆ At a “four” level, schools have a system in place, everyone knows it, and it becomes the way business is done and decisions are made.
 - ◆ “Five”, located at the right of each *Continuum*, represents a school that is one step removed from “world class quality.” The school knows how it gets its best results, which is optimized throughout the system. All decisions are proactive.

The seven *Continuous Improvement Continuums* categories are—

- *Information and Analysis*
- *Student Achievement*
- *Quality Planning*
- *Professional Learning*
- *Leadership*
- *Partnership Development*
- *Continuous Improvement and Evaluation*

The elements from one to five describe how that *Continuum* is hypothesized to evolve in a continuously improving school. Each *Continuum* moves from a reactive mode to a proactive mode—from fire fighting to prevention. The five in Approach, Implementation, and Outcome in each *Continuum* is the target. Vertically, the Approach, Implementation, and Outcome statements, for any number one through five, are hypotheses. In other words, the implementation statement describes how

Figure 2.5
CONTINUOUS IMPROVEMENT CONTINUUMS FOR SCHOOLS ~ INFORMATION AND ANALYSIS

	One	Two	Three	Four	Five
Approach	Represents a reactive school. Data on information about student performance and needs are not gathered in any systematic way; there is no way to determine what needs to change at the school, based on data.	Represents a school that uses the process in some places some of the time, mainly for compliance. There is no systematic process, but some teacher and student information is collected and used to problem solve and meet accountability expectations.	Represents a school with a system in place. School collects all types of data, including demographics, student learning, perceptions, and school processes. The information is used to drive the strategic quality plan for school change.	Represents a school with a system in place that becomes the way business is done. There is systematic reliance on data (including data for subgroups) as a basis for decision making at the classroom level as well as at the school level. Changes are based on the study of data to meet the needs of students and teachers.	Represents a proactive school that is one step away from world class quality. Information is gathered in all areas of student interaction with the school. Teachers engage students in gathering information on their own performance. Accessible to all levels, data are comprehensive in scope and an accurate reflection of school quality.
Implementation	No information is gathered with which to make changes. Student dissatisfaction with the learning process is seen as an irritation, not a need for improvement.	Some data are tracked, such as student learning results, attendance, and behavior. Only a few individuals are asked for feedback about areas of schooling.	School collects information on current and former students (e.g., student achievement, demographics, perceptions), analyzes and uses it in conjunction with future trends for planning. Identified areas for improvement are tracked over time.	Data are used to improve the effectiveness of teaching strategies on all student performances are graphed and utilized for diagnostics. Student evaluations and performances are analyzed by teachers in all classrooms, along with process data.	Innovative teaching processes that meet the needs of students are implemented to the delight of teachers, parents, and students. Information is analyzed and used to prevent student failure. Contributing causes are known through analyses. Problems are prevented through the use of data.
Outcome	Only anecdotal and hypothetical information are available about student performance, behavior, and satisfaction. Problems are solved individually with short-term results.	Little data are available. Change is limited to some areas of the school and dependent upon individual teachers and their efforts.	Information collected about student and parent needs, assessments, and instructional practices is shared with the school staff and used to plan for change. Information helps staff understand pressing issues, analyze information for “contributing causes,” and track results for improvement.	A comprehensive information system is in place. Positive trends begin to appear in many classrooms and schoolwide. There is evidence that these results are caused by understanding and effectively using data, systemwide.	Students are delighted with the school’s instructional processes and proud of their own capabilities to learn and assess their own growth. Good to excellent achievement is the result for all students. No student falls through the cracks. Teachers use data to predict and prevent potential problems, and optimize their results.

Measuring a school's progress against identified criteria—such as the Education for the Future Continuous Improvement Continuums—provides a benchmark that schools can use to see if their actions have created the results they intended.

the approach might look when implemented, and the outcome is the “pay-off” for implementing the approach. If the hypotheses are accurate, the outcome will not be realized until the approach is actually implemented.

Measuring a school's progress against identified criteria—such as the *Education for the Future Continuous Improvement Continuums*—provides a benchmark that schools can use to see if their actions have created the results they intended. These measures are supported by analyzing data gathered through questionnaires, performance measures, and observations of the learning environment. When these measures are used on a regular basis, the results clearly document trends and provide information that assists schools in determining next steps for improvement.

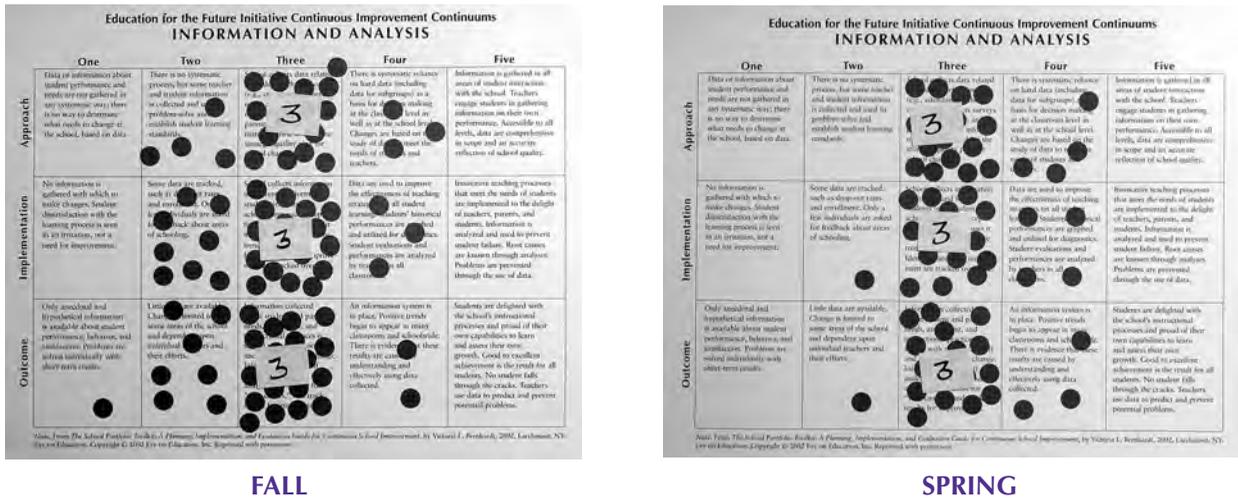
ASSESSING ON THE CONTINUOUS IMPROVEMENT CONTINUUMS

In a whole-staff meeting, the facilitator (preferably not the principal, so she/he can participate in the discussion) introduces a *Continuum*, such as *Information and Analysis*, shown as Figure 2.5. Each staff member independently reads the *Continuum* from left to right, from a one and to a five, and identifies where she/he believes the school is right now, with respect to Approach, Implementation, and Outcome. Staff members place a colorful dot on the *Continuum* (enlarged and placed on the wall before staff arrived at the meeting) where they believe the *school* is with respect to Approach, Implementation, and Outcome. After everyone has placed her or his dot on the poster, staff discusses why they thought the school was a one, two, three, four, or five. After coming to consensus, staff members discuss what they need to do to move up in the *Continuum*, and the facilitator records next steps. They continue through the seven *Continuous Improvement Continuums*. By the time they have finished, it is clear to everyone in the school where they are as an organization and what they must do to improve.

Figure 2.6 shows the *Information and Analysis Continuum* completed by a staff in the Fall, on the left, and in the Spring, on the right. In the Fall, staff members felt they were somewhere between a two and a four most of the time—a school that has not been collaborating well. Some staff members believe data are only used when they have to, while others believe they use data all the time. The interesting part is to consider which dots represent the staff members who actually write the school improvement plan. Yes; they are the fours. They wonder why their plans are not implemented! After clarifying what they have for data and how they really do use data, they discuss next steps, and implement them.

Staff assessed again in the Spring. This time, as the picture on the right shows, they moved almost all the twos to at least threes. In other words, they picked up a portion of their staff and got them on the same page. With clarity of what they are really doing and what they need to do, the whole school can move ahead.

Figure 2.6
EXAMPLE OF CONTINUOUS IMPROVEMENT CONTINUUM ASSESSMENT, FALL AND SPRING



Assessing on the *Continuous Improvement Continuums* is a powerful way to find out what staff are believing, and therefore, acting on, with respect to the components of continuous school improvement. This assessment will show clearly why the school is getting its current results. By understanding staff preconceptions, we have a way to engage staff members, and bring them forward together. The discussion will automatically lead staff to what they need to do to get different results. Schools need only to assess once a year, although many schools choose to assess twice the first year.

Schools use these *Continuums* annually as a vehicle for ongoing self-assessment. School staffs use the assessments to renew staff commitment to continuous school improvement. They use the results of the assessments to—

- ◆ find out where they really are, as a staff;
- ◆ acknowledge their accomplishments;
- ◆ get all staff on the same page;
- ◆ set goals for improvement; and
- ◆ keep school districts and partners apprised of the progress they have made in their continuous school improvement efforts.

Assessing on the Continuous Improvement Continuums is a powerful way to find out what staff are believing, and therefore, acting upon, with respect to the components of continuous school improvement.

HOW MUCH TIME DOES IT TAKE?

Providing staff with an overview of the continuous school improvement framework, assessing on the *Education for the Future Continuous Improvement Continuums*, and discussing next steps will take about three hours.

REFLECTION QUESTIONS

1. What is continuous school improvement?
2. Why is it important to have a framework for continuous school improvement?
3. What are the five essential questions of continuous school improvement?

APPLICATION OPPORTUNITIES

1. Provide an overview of the *Continuous School Improvement Framework* for staff.
2. As you review the *Continuous School Improvement Framework* (Figure 2.1), determine which components are missing from your school's continuous school improvement efforts.
3. Conduct an assessment on the *Continuous Improvement Continuums* (Appendix A) to find out where staff believe your school is right now and to determine what has to happen next to improve.