Appendix III

History of School Improvement Requirements 1985 to the Present

Introduction
The school improvement requirements must be recognized as an evolutionary process. School improvement in Illinois has been influenced by the legislative, political, and educational conditions and philosophies of the times. It is not a direct line; nor is it a case of a “clean slate” and “let’s start over” evolution. Many of the changes Illinois has experienced are based on perceptions, some validated by data and some not.

1985 – Establishment of the Illinois Goals for Learning
The Illinois General Assembly passed legislation that established the State Goals for Learning (the forerunner of the Illinois Learning Standards) and required development of state tests (the Illinois Goal Assessment Program—IGAP). The State Goals for Learning were adopted in 1986 and the first IGAP was administered in 1988. School improvement plans were required beginning in 1985. Discussions about accountability and school improvement were preliminary, with less than $300,000 allocated for implementation.

1992 – Call for New Accountability
The General Assembly adopted legislation that created an Academic Watch List in 1992 with an amendment in 1996 to add an Academic Early Warning List. The call for increased accountability was championed by the business community that demanded schools be more than “compliant” – rather schools should be required to show evidence that students were achieving and improving academically. A new requirement to include individual student scores on IGAP began in 1993. A greater emphasis on the “state test” was emerging. Few dollars were allocated for school improvement implementation.

1993 - School Improvement and Quality Review
As a result of the call for increased accountability and “evidence,” school improvement plans were required to be submitted to ISBE. It became apparent that the submission of a plan did not assure that all students were actually learning since most did not include an analysis and interpretation of student achievement data. The next iteration of accountability was the development of a designation system that had three components: Compliance, State Assessment Results, and Local Assessment Results. For the first time, the state was requiring schools to show evidence with valid and reliable assessment instruments that their students were achieving. The rules were very detailed and required schools to provide substantial documentation. This was compounded by the lack of school staff experience in developing and implementing a system of school improvement in which curriculum, instruction, and assessment were intricately linked. Educators responded that the requirements expected “too much paperwork” and resulted in limited time for teaching due to the record keeping demands. Limited staff development, resources and time were provided to assist schools to meet and prepare for these demands. The Quality Review process became the “state intrusion” into local control. The demand for evidence of student achievement was translated into state bureaucracy at its worst.
1996 – Quality Assurance and Improvement Planning

Under the direction of a new state superintendent, the requirements for evidence of student achievement based on extensive development of local assessment systems were dropped. A revised program was developed that included some components of the previous system. The philosophy of the new system sought to support Illinois schools by collaborating with educators and the wider community in promoting effective school inquiry and useful school improvement planning. Through recognition of the unique circumstances of schools, and linking school improvement to accountability, the revised process hoped to add value to the essential enterprise of schooling: teaching and learning. The process supported a culture of inquiry by examining student learning, progress and achievement, and sustained continuous improvement in the quality of teaching and learning, thereby strengthening schools as learning communities. Internal review and external review were considered to be vehicles for continuous improvement and included using a variety of data collection methods, e.g., observations, student shadowing, document review, and interviews. The review and the report offered a summary of observations and the results of the reflections of the review team. A fundamental belief of the system was that the school was best suited to evaluate its own planning. The emphasis was on process rather than results. Although many in the education community supported this system, many found it be lacking in accountability for results as indicated by state assessment scores. The increased rigor of the new assessment based on the Illinois Learning Standards (ISAT) resulted in many more schools that had scores of less than 50% meeting standards. Another factor that resulted in a call for changing this system was the inability to bring the system to scale – given the staff and resources and the expectation that external reviews would be conducted in 4,000 schools within five years.