

Based on the model Klein describes, an educational premortem might unfold as follows:

Step 1: The people involved are briefed on the plan and its goals.

Groups of teachers, principals, and district leaders learn about an initiative to help teachers understand and apply important findings from reading research that have accumulated since the National Reading Panel.

Step 2: The leader explains to participants they are to assume the plan has failed spectacularly.

The focus groups imagine the failure of the proposed initiative (perhaps after having been briefed on the difficulties of Reading First).

Step 3: Participants are then asked to write down every reason they could think of for the failure, *assuming that the plan had failed*. Reasons are stated in the past tense.

- Teachers describe sitting through professional development sessions that didn't offer strategies for practical application, or being handed scripted curricula without a rationale or supports for implementation. They recount walk-throughs completed by administrators carrying clipboards, followed by disciplinary meetings focused on being "off-script." They describe having fallen out of love with their job because they were not allowed to make time for the things they loved doing with their students. All of these led to compliance under duress and only when someone was watching. They were greatly relieved when the Board called it off.
- Principals report that this initiative added excessively to their other tasks and led to burn-out. It was at the bottom of their priority list, but they created an appearance of compliance. They also said they had troubling conversations with district leadership because their school-staff did not respond favorably to the initiative. It was nearly impossible to hold teachers accountable for instruction that they, as school leaders, did not know how to execute or evaluate. They felt unable to lead this work either alone or with their literacy coach, who did not have the respect of classroom teachers. They too were greatly relieved when the Board called it off.
- District leaders explain there were inadequate resources (money, staff, materials, etc.) to support the plan adequately, so it never really got off the ground as envisioned. Monitoring the initiative was an additional unwelcome burden. Early evaluation results did not look promising: Teachers were given a lot of PD, but there was scant evidence of improved student achievement. Making things worse, some parents raised objections about the plan because they feared it would lead to a narrowing of the curriculum: "We've been down this road before when our older kids were here," one outspoken parent said. Others, including one who identified herself as the parent of a child with reading difficulties, was enthusiastic about the plan and accused other parents of not caring what happened to her child and others like him. Disagreements got ugly. Combined with disgruntlement among teachers and administrators and poor early evaluation results, the Board voted to direct the superintendent to shelve the plan, at least for the moment. But probably forever.

Step 4: The leader asks each person in the room (including her/himself) to read one reason the plan failed; the reasons are recorded.

Step 5: Participants continue reading aloud from their list until all reasons are read and recorded .

Step 6: After the session is over, the leader and others selected to problem-solve meet to strengthen the plan.