5

Leadership and Decision Making: Introduction

Center on Innovation & Improvement

True to its nature, the field of education customarily relies upon the lever of change it knows best for improving schools—building the capacity of educators to better perform their roles by teaching them new skills and ways of doing things. Capacity building through training, professional development, and access to resources is a single lever for change, and alone it is often disappointing in its effects.

The accountability movement has taught us that improvement requires yardsticks for performance, both to guide school people's improvement efforts and to enhance their motivation to change. Public disclosure of school performance, based on transparent metrics, carries with it incentives for change. Public recognition of exemplary performance provides a positive incentive—something to strive for. Public disclosure of poor performance is a negative incentive—educators try harder to avoid it.

For the past couple decades, school improvement has largely been driven by these two levers of change—capacity building (professional development tied to evidence-based practices) and incentives (accountability's double-edged sword of public recognition and professional embarrassment). However, capacity and incentive without opportunity create a formula for frustration and discouragement. The 2009 SIG program adds to these two levers of change an important third one—opportunity for change. Simply put, this means getting out of people's way so they can make decisions, take actions, and assume responsibility for what they do.

The interventions of turnaround and transformation call for greater school-level autonomy, more flexibility in staffing, scheduling, and budgeting, along with greater accountability for results. A restart, wherein the school is opened under new governance and with a chance for dramatically new ways of operating, carries with it the expanded autonomy granted to charter schools and educational management organizations. Given the opportunity for greater latitude in decision making, just how does leadership respond?

This chapter looks at provisions in the SIG program that expand school leaders' opportunity to make sound decisions by:

- removing bureaucratic and regulatory barriers,
- providing essential information and tools for analyzing data, and
- tracking progress to facilitate agile adjustments in course.

The chapter's topics reinforce the SIG program's insistence upon greater school-level autonomy and responsibility, more flexibility in local decision making, and greater accountability on the part of school leaders for results. As a counter-balance to the over-reliance on the leadership of one person (the principal), the chapter also provides guidance for putting in place team structures and processes to distribute leadership (as well as responsibility) in order to accelerate change and sustain positive reforms.

Establishing Team Structures to Drive Improvement

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Teams at both the district and school levels, when effectively purposed, organized, and supervised, provide an infrastructure for continuous improvement. District teams' decisions can be informed by input from the school teams.

Marzano (2003) points out that leadership should not reside with one individual; a team approach to planning and decision making allows for distributive leadership. While principals in effective schools promote staff collaboration, teachers working with less effective instructional leaders function more as individuals than as members of a school team—"in the less successful schools, teachers were often left completely alone to plan what to teach, with little guidance from their senior colleagues and little coordination with other teachers" (Rutter et al., 1979, p. 136). Collaborative activities that do occur in these less successful schools are more socially based and less professionally oriented than the exchanges that occur in schools with more effective instructional leaders.

Schmoker (1996) recommends that teams of teachers implement, assess, and adjust instruction in short-term cycles of improvement—not annually, but continuously. Common team tasks include intensive efforts to align content taught across grades, and development of interim and diagnostic mini-assessments to monitor student progress on a continuing basis. Practices such as the development of agendas and minutes and the use of organized procedures for meetings help the teams stay focused and maintain a history of team work.

Planning and decision making within the district and school require *teams*, *time*, and *access to timely information*. That is, decision-making groups must be organized and given time to plan and monitor the parts of the system for which they are responsible. Hassel et al. (2006) provide useful tools to begin the change process and get planning teams started.

A basic structure for team planning, work, and decision making in a school includes a Leadership Team, Instructional Teams, and a team focused on the family-school connection (such as a School Community Council).

- The Leadership Team is typically comprised of the principal and team leaders from the Instructional Teams (grade level or subject area teams). The Leadership Team may also function as the School Improvement Team, with parent members attending meetings scheduled for purposes of reviewing and amending the school improvement plan.
- Instructional Teams are manageable groupings of teachers by grade level or subject area who meet to develop instructional strategies aligned to the standards-based curriculum and to monitor the progress of the students in the grade levels or subject area for which the team is responsible.
- A School Community Council is comprised of the principal, counselor, social worker, teachers, and parents (typical configuration), with parents constituting the majority of the membership. The School Community Council advises, plans, and assists with matters related to the school-home compact, homework, open houses, parent-teacher conferences, school-home communication, and parent education (including training and information about learning standards and the parents' role in supporting children's learning at home).

Action Principles

For District

1. Address district and school team structures and expectations in official district policy.
2. Expect teams to sustain their operation even through changes in district and school leadership.
3. Provide adequate time for teams to meet, conduct business, and meet the expectations of district policy.
4. Require teams to prepare and maintain documentation of meeting agendas, minutes, and work products.
5. Provide professional development for district and school personnel on effective teaming practices.

6. Include successful engagement of teams and evidence of their productivity in evaluation of district and school administrators.
7. Systematize the regular reporting of the work of school and district teams to the school board.

For School

1. Incorporate team structures into the school improvement plan and school governance policy.
2. Develop written statements of purpose and by-laws for each team's operation.
3. Provide teams with work plans for the year and specific work products to produce.
4. Insure that all teams prepare agendas for their meetings, maintain minutes, and catalog their work products.
5. Maintain a file of the agendas, work products, and minutes of all teams.
6. Provide adequate time for teams to meet, conduct business, and meet the expectations of district and school policy. A rule of thumb is that Leadership Teams and School Community Councils meet twice each month for an hour each meeting; Instructional Teams meet twice each month for 45 minutes to conduct business and for blocks of time of 4 to 6 hours each month to review student learning data and develop and refine instructional plans.
7. Insure that teams receive timely access to information, including student progress data and summaries of classroom observations.
8. Provide professional development on effective teaming practices.

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Granting Waivers and Exemptions

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Research on change efforts such as the New American Schools comprehensive school reform initiative (Berends, Bodilly, & Nataraj Kirby, 2002) and Edison Schools (Gill et al., 2005) document the importance of giving educators the flexibility to implement significant changes. States have established advisory processes to examine existing regulations and propose changes to remove barriers to improvement, replacing regulation with results-based accountability. States have also provided waiver and exemption processes that allows districts to request relief from particular regulations that restrict their innovation.

Collective bargaining agreements between districts and staff organizations can also create obstacles to change (Hannaway & Rotherham, 2006), as can local policies set by school boards (Hill, 2003). One barrier to improvement identified by California's state policymakers, for example, was the set of collective bargaining provisions allowing senior teachers to transfer within school districts until very close to the start of school. This made it difficult for districts to hire and place new teachers on a reasonable timeline. The state enacted new legislation in 2006 that allows principals to hire teachers after April 15 regardless of whether they are seniority-based transfers (Scott & Rhee, 2006). Vermont established standards that guide state department of education policies, including one requiring that "any rule or law should advance student performance, but not in such a rigid manner as to foreclose alternate means of achieving goals" (State of Vermont Board of Education, 1992, January 21, pp. 3-4 in Lusi, 1997).

Action Principles

For State

1. Establish a process for continuous review of state regulations and examination of proposed legislation and regulation to reduce regulatory burden on districts and schools.
2. Provide waiver and exemption procedures whereby districts can petition for relief from regulations that restrict innovation.
3. Grant charter-like autonomy to schools in the process of turnaround or transformation.
4. Amend state collective bargaining statutes and regulations that limit the ability of districts and schools to make justifiable changes in staffing policies and procedures.
5. Use state policy- and rule-making authority to place constraints on the barriers thrown up by districts.

For District

1. Establish a process for continuous review of district policy to reduce burden on schools and principals.
2. Provide waiver and exemption procedures whereby schools can petition for relief from district policy that restricts their innovation.
3. Grant charter-like autonomy to schools in the process of turnaround.
4. Negotiate for changes in collective bargaining agreements to provide principals with greater control over the hiring, placement, and retention of staff.

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Providing Flexibility in Staffing, Scheduling, Budgeting

Center on Innovation & Improvement

State legislatures, governors, state boards of education, SEAs, and districts are uniquely positioned to create the conditions for change. As a result, states and districts also need to attend to the opportunities that state and district policy provides for districts and schools to do what they need to do to improve student performance. According to the Mass Insight Education & Research Institute's *The Turnaround Challenge*, "States and districts can engineer more effective turnaround at scale by creating space that supports *outside*-the-system approaches, focused *inside* the system" (Calkins et al., 2007, p. 11). Its top lesson learned from high-performing, high-poverty schools is, "Clearly defined authority to act based on what's best for children and learning—i.e., flexibility and control over staffing, scheduling, budget, and curriculum" (Calkins et al., 2007, p. 11).

Flexibility can take many forms. Schedules might be modified to accommodate longer school days or years to provide longer periods for some subjects or to set aside time for teachers to meet to discuss student work. Schools might elect to allocate money to hire extra reading teachers or curriculum coordinators or use some funds to pay teachers for extra hours spent examining and discussing data or engaging in professional development activities. Mid-continent Research for Education and Learning (2003) states that, for the best likelihood of sustained improvement, "the school has control over the majority of its budget. To the extent possible all funds from different sources are combined and directed in support of school goals."

In a case study of improvement in the Kansas City, Kansas schools, Lane (2009) found that one of the key strategies supporting dramatic improvement was providing schools with "defined autonomy," in which principals had flexibility and control in the areas of staffing, budget, and scheduling. Specifically, to help them address the challenges of increased accountability, principals and teachers were given autonomy to decide how best to implement improvement activities in their schools. For example, to facilitate changes in staffing and scheduling, the district and the teachers' union added a provision to the teachers' contract, "'contract flex,' that allowed schools to quickly propose changes to staffing and scheduling and have these changes approved by the union on a school-by-school basis" (p. 28). This required that the central office place considerable trust in local school staff, but the defined autonomy engendered "an atmosphere of trust and an emerging culture of improvement" (p. 29) and also "reinforced the idea that the district and schools share the responsibility for what happens in schools and in classrooms" (p. 32). The district set non-negotiable goals, but allowed schools the latitude to decide for themselves how best to attain those goals.

Action Principles

For State

1. Provide waiver and exemption procedures whereby districts can petition for relief from regulations that restrict their flexibility in staffing, scheduling, and budgeting based on local needs (Redding & Walberg, 2008).
2. Grant charter-like autonomy to schools in the process of turnaround (Barber, 2008).
3. Amend state collective bargaining statutes and regulations that limit the ability of districts and schools to make justifiable changes in staffing, budgeting, and scheduling policies and procedures (Massachusetts Commonwealth Pilot School Model).
4. Use state policy- and rule-making authority to place constraints on the barriers caused by district policies (Redding & Walberg, 2008).

For District

1. Provide waiver and exemption procedures whereby schools can petition for relief from district policies that restrict their flexibility in staffing, scheduling, and budgeting based on local needs (Redding & Walberg, 2008).

2. Grant charter-like autonomy to schools in the process of turnaround (Barber, 2008).
3. Negotiate for changes in collective bargaining agreements to provide principals with greater control over budgeting, scheduling, and the hiring, placement, and retention of staff (Massachusetts Commonwealth Pilot School Model; Lane, 2009).
4. Give principals the flexibility to act based on what works for the school's student population—including making decisions about scheduling, staffing, and budgeting (Kowal et al., 2009).

For School

1. Consider scheduling changes that could facilitate improved student learning.
2. Provide teachers with the opportunity to use time differently, such as allocating more time for monitoring student progress, data analysis, joint planning, or professional development (Kowal et al., 2009).
3. Align budgets with school improvement priorities.

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Establishing Early Warning Systems

National High School Center

Nearly one-third of all high school students leave the public school system before graduating (Swanson, 2004), and the problem is particularly severe among students of color and students with disabilities (Greene & Winters, 2005). One important element of dropout prevention efforts is the early identification of students at highest risk for dropping out and the targeting of resources to keep them in school. An early warning system that uses indicators based on readily accessible data can predict, during students' first year in high school, whether the students are on the right path toward eventual graduation.

Research is clear that ninth grade is a "make or break" year. More students fail ninth grade than any other grade in high school, and a disproportionate number of students who are held back in ninth grade subsequently drop out (Herlihy, 2007). The most powerful predictors of whether a student will complete high school include course performance and attendance during the first year of high school (Allensworth & Easton, 2005; 2007). Therefore, systematic collection of student attendance and course performance data can be used to develop an effective early warning system that can also be tailored to local contexts.

There are several ways to use course performance information to gauge students' likelihood of graduating or dropping out. One of the most powerful is to calculate a version of the "on-track indicator" that has been customized to fit local contexts. The Consortium on Chicago School Research introduced the "on-track indicator" in 2005 by combining two highly predictive ninth-grade risk factors: course credits earned and course grades. First-year high school students in the Chicago Public Schools are classified as "on track" if they earn (a) at least five full-year course credits and (b) no more than one F in one semester in a core course during the first year of high school. On-track students are more than 3.5 times more likely than students who are off track to graduate from high school in 4 years (Allensworth & Easton, 2005). The on-track indicator reflects students' ninth grade academic performance. Additionally, attendance during the first year of high school is also directly related to high school completion rates. Even moderate levels of absences (1-2 weeks in the first semester of high school) are associated with lower rates of high school graduation (Allensworth & Easton, 2007). The biggest risk factor for failing ninth grade is the number of absences during the first 30 days of high school, and failing ninth grade is one of the most important predictors of dropping out (Neild & Balfanz, 2006).

Action Principles

For State

1. Use and monitor aggregate on-track rates to identify high schools and districts with high proportions of students at risk of dropping out in order to prioritize allocation of resources.
2. Create state-level data systems that incorporate on-track indicators and that allow incorporation of local data.
3. Provide professional development for district and school staff on how to conduct their own data analysis.
4. Identify context-specific early warning signs and use the data to the fullest extent.

For District

1. Create data collection systems that allow schools to easily collect key early warning data.
2. Use data to identify students at each school who are at the highest risk of dropping out.
3. Support continuous data analysis at the school level, across schools, and district-wide.
4. Provide data collection and analysis training to school level staff.
5. Target district funding and resources to support schools in identifying students early, intervention strategies for at-risk students, and collaboration among high schools across the district or region.

6. Develop continuous improvement strategies, so that indicators can be refined to improve their predictive power in the local context.
7. Include the "on-track" indicator or a local adaptation of it as an accountability measure for the schools in the district (e.g., as done in Chicago Public Schools, see Allensworth & Easton, 2005).

For School

1. Develop or ascertain an early warning system based on evidence-based indicators (Heppen & Therriault, 2008; Heppen, O'Cummings, & Therriault, 2008).
2. Assign staff to create a plan to monitor indicators of risk over the course of the school year.
3. Identify and evaluate intervention strategies that support students most at risk for dropping out.
4. Use the data to tell the story and make the case for intervention programs/practices. For example, use the "on-track" indicator data to apply for additional local or state resources, to communicate needs, and identify common needs among at-risk students in the school.
5. Refine the early warning system indicators to reflect local context (see Jerald, 2006).

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Hiring and Evaluating External Partners

Center on Innovation & Improvement

External providers can provide critical expertise and capacity to states and districts committed to initiating dramatic school improvement efforts. States and districts may hire external providers to:

1. **Assess the needs of individual schools** to determine which model would work best in that school; hire an external provider to conduct school quality reviews or needs assessments;
2. **Develop a state- or district-wide structure to support dramatic improvement** (e.g., hire an external provider to develop a pipeline of skilled school turnaround leaders);
3. **Manage a state- or district-wide cluster of schools identified for turnaround** (e.g., hire an external provider to coordinate targeted assistance to a cluster of lowest performing schools);
4. **Operate individual schools identified to implement the restart model** (e.g., partner with a charter management organization or education management organization to operate the school); or
5. **Provide targeted technical assistance to build the state's or district's capacity for dramatic district and school improvement** (e.g., hire an external provider to recruit, select, and train individuals to serve as instructional coaches in schools identified for intervention or improve programs for students with disabilities).

Regardless of which of the above tasks the contractor is being asked to perform, there will be some commonalities among the various contracts. The Comprehensive School Reform Quality Center and The Finance Project (2006) provide criteria for assessing a prospective contractor's organizational and financial ability to perform the necessary work. Building on extensive contracting in the charter sector, the National Association of Charter School Authorizers (2005; 2009) has codified key steps to selecting and managing contracts with external service providers.

The foundation of the relationship between states or districts and external partners is a thoughtfully negotiated contract that articulates roles, responsibilities, performance expectations, and consequences for failure to meet expectations. Regardless of whether it is a state department of education or a district pursuing the relationship, a rigorous evaluation of the partner's capacity is essential to fully leveraging the potential expertise of external partners to support focused and dramatic school improvement efforts. As experience with Supplemental Educational Services has shown, this is not an insignificant undertaking; care in vetting the capacity and experience of external partners before engaging in a contractual relationship is essential, and correcting deficiency in performance or terminating contracts once executed is a painful process for all concerned.

Steps for States and Districts in Hiring External Partners

States and districts interested in hiring external partners to help with school improvement efforts need to establish structures that will allow them to recruit, select, establish relationship terms, manage, and evaluate the providers (Kowal & Arkin, 2005). Building on the lessons culled from hiring external providers to work in traditional as well as chartered public schools, the following steps provide a blueprint for states and districts interested in creating a rigorous system to attract, select, manage, and continuously evaluate external providers offering a range of school improvement services (Hassel & Hassel, 2005; Kowal & Arkin, 2005; National Alliance for Public Charter Schools, 2005; National Association of Charter School Authorizers, 2005; Rhim, 2004; 2005a; 2005b; 2009). These steps are important whether a state department of education or a local board of education is hiring the external provider:

1. Identify unambiguous reasons for hiring an external partner;
2. Engage stakeholders about the need to hire eternal providers and ensure the entire process is transparent and fair;

3. Articulate specific goals of the relationship with the external partner, including measurable expectations and criteria for selection of external partners to meet these goals;
4. Create conditions to attract multiple high quality external partners (e.g., extend key flexibilities, allocate adequate funds for external providers, infuse fairness and transparency into selection and accountability processes);
5. Budget adequate funding to support relationship with external partner for duration of contract;
6. Develop a rigorous process to select an external partner whose experience and qualifications match the specified goals (e.g., a written application, due diligence to confirm track record of success and financial stability, an in-person interview with the external provider's leadership team, and, if appropriate due to scope, a site visit to schools receiving services from the external partner);
7. Negotiate a contract outlining roles and responsibilities of the external partner as well as the district and relevant schools, and if applicable, state department of education, as well as explicit and measurable outcomes, including interim indicators of growth;
8. Provide support as needed and appropriate but do not micro-manage external partner;
9. Evaluate the external partner's progress toward goals; and
10. Define consequences for failure (e.g., termination or modification of contract).

Action Principles

For State

State departments of education are well positioned to *establish the conditions* for external providers to fill a distinct need in districts and schools as well as *hire external partners* for a variety of services.

1. Address policy barriers that might limit the role of the state education agency in such efforts.
2. Rather than asking individual districts to vet potential partners, state education agency staff should proactively identify qualified partners who meet certain standards and provide districts with a list of "approved" or "preferred" partners.
3. Provide assistance to district personnel by developing model selection procedures that assess multiple aspects of an external partner's performance.
4. Contribute to the evaluation of the effectiveness of an external partner by making certain that the state has high quality and coherent state assessment systems that provides districts with a nuanced understanding of overall school performance as well as growth of individual student sub-groups.
5. Create and adequately support a state-level office to identify specific schools for targeted assistance from external partners and thereafter recruit, select, establish relationship terms, manage, and evaluate the partners using the key action principles.

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Using Operational Data, Including Classroom Observations

Center on Instruction/Center on Innovation & Improvement

Student learning data tells us the results of the school's operations. To improve those results, we must also examine operational data. Operations include each teacher's delivery of instruction, but also teachers' instructional planning, their development and alignment of curriculum, and their teaming processes. Operations also extend to the support services provided for students, the curriculum and course offerings, the schedule, and the allocation of resources. In other words, the school's operations are seen in the daily practices of the adults in the building, the people with responsibility for students' learning. In order to make the adjustments in practice that lead to improved student learning, information about the school's operations must be examined alongside student learning data. Results for students improve when the adults in the school change what they do that influences student learning.

The quality of school operations can be assessed by rating practices using indicators of effective practice, rubrics, and examples of evidence. States and districts provide instruments and assessment/planning tools for school teams to engage in continuous improvement cycles through regular examination of their operational practices (Redding, 2006). See the Appendix for examples of indicators of effective practice from the Center on Innovation & Improvement and the National High School Center.

Enhancing the quality of instruction is a key to school improvement. To improve teaching quality, data on classroom instruction is essential. These data may focus on teacher behavior only or on the interaction of teacher and student behavior. The former is common for teacher appraisal and the latter is common for understanding how variations in teaching behaviors affect gains in student achievement (Foorman & Schatschneider, 2003; Smith, Dickinson, Sangeorge, & Anastasopoulos, 2002; Taylor, Pearson, Peterson, & Rodriquez, 2003).

In the latter case the observation may include questions about student engagement and the fidelity with which a particular curriculum is implemented. In both cases, the observation instruments must have adequate reliability and validity if they are to be used for decision making. Reliability can generally be increased by increasing the number of times the teacher is observed or by increasing the number of observers. In order for a measure to be valid, it must be reliable, i.e., replicable. Thus, the goal of measuring instruction of inferential comprehension strategies is only realized if inter-rater reliability is adequate (Gersten, Dimino, & Jayanthi, 2007).

Action Principles

For State

1. Provide districts and schools with standards and indicators of effective practice along with tools for self-assessment and planning for continuous improvement.
2. Use a classroom observation tool for monitoring schools in need of improvement, in corrective action, or undergoing restructuring; make it a part of the leadership plans for instruction.

For District

1. Maintain a district-level improvement team that engages in continuous examination of district practices, guided by standards and indicators of effective district practice.
2. Use a classroom observation tool for monitoring schools in need of improvement, in corrective action, or undergoing restructuring; make it a part of district leadership and instruction plans.

For School

1. Maintain a school improvement team that engages in continuous examination of school practices, guided by standards and indicators of effective district practice.
2. The administrative team might use a classroom observation tool to link data on instructional practices to students' achievement. These data can be used to inform decisions regarding teacher professional development and the need for additional instructional resources.

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Monitoring Fidelity of Implementation

Center on Innovation & Improvement

A model or program is a coherent and systematic assemblage of practices. Fidelity of implementation means adherence to both the proper execution of the specific practices and the effective coordination of all the practices as they are intended to be combined. A program or practice with demonstrated effectiveness in some schools can be ineffective elsewhere if the way it is being implemented takes it far away from its original (evidence-based) design. This variation in outcome has spurred a heightened interest in the science of "implementation." The experience with comprehensive school reform (CSR) models contributed greatly to this line of investigation. Even though CSR models are, by definition, "research based," they tend to produce different results in different contexts, and the variation in outcomes has often been attributed to differences in the fidelity of implementation (Berends, Bodilly, & Nataraj Kirby, 2002). "Only when effective practices are fully implemented should we expect positive outcomes. Implementation matters" (Blase & Fixsen, 2005, p. 10).

In recognition of this problem, researchers began focusing on the concept of *fidelity of implementation*, the delivery of content and instructional strategies in the way in which they were designed and intended to be delivered: accurately and consistently" (National Center on Response to Intervention, n.d., online).

Fixsen discusses what can happen when an effective program is not implemented properly and calls the result an "implementation gap." This gap can occur either when the program or practice, from the start, is not used with fidelity or when an originally "good" implementation "disappears with time and turnover" (2006, online). A U.S. Department of Education (2009) guide to implementation of research-based programs highlights the importance of ensuring that the core elements of a program are implemented as designed. These could include the basic program structure, content, and method of delivery.

Plans for monitoring fidelity of implementation should actually begin when programs are being considered for adoption. In general, "the more clearly the core components of an intervention program or practice are defined, the more readily the program or practice can be implemented successfully" (Fixen, Naoom, Blasé, Friedman, & Wallace, 2005, p. 24). Researchers have identified elements of programs that can impact fidelity of implementation. For example, programs that are "packaged" to simplify the tasks of implementation and programs that are a good match with the needs of the target population and school site are more likely to be implemented with fidelity (Getting Results, 2007).

In addition, a school's failure to put core elements in place could be the result of inadequate staff training and preparation or staff unwillingness to shift away from programs or practices with which they are comfortable. Thus, once a program has been selected, attention must be paid to preparing staff to implement the program by providing training, opportunities to practice, and coaching as needed (Guldbrandsson, 2008). Wallace et al. (2008) identify key "implementation drivers" that, when given sufficient attention, increase the likelihood that an instructional program will be implemented correctly. These include elements such as observations to ensure that the program is being implemented correctly, with intervention if necessary.

While careful program selection, planning, and staff preparation can make effective implementation more likely, continued monitoring is critical to ensure that the program or practice continues to be implemented as designed—and to assess the program's impact on student learning. Ongoing and "systematic data collection about implementation is needed. By determining which program components are firmly in place and which ones are only being given lip service, those managing the new program can learn about and address the barriers that are limiting or interfering with use [and help schools] fine-tune their efforts to make a program work" (Yap et al., 2000, p. 19). This ongoing assessment of fidelity of implementation also provides information critical to assessing whether it is the program or the implementation of the program that is the problem if the expected positive impact does not occur.

Action Principles

For State and District

1. Consider possible difficulties with implementation when selecting new programs and be ready to address the difficulties.
2. For any program implemented, state- or district-wide, provide comprehensive training and support materials for staff with opportunities for teacher practice and corrective feedback included in the training plan.
3. Develop "calibration checks" for teachers to use to monitor their own implementation (Gunn, n.d., online).
4. Include principals in training with emphasis on what the program looks like in practice so that principals can provide effective monitoring and feedback on an ongoing basis.
5. Develop a plan for monitoring implementation of the program that includes data collection, observation of the program as implemented, analysis of the data, and planning for ways to address off-target implementation or "poor-fidelity drift."
6. Use the data collected regarding fidelity of implementation in efforts to identify possible reasons for programs not performing as expected.

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Documenting and Reporting Progress to Inform Practice

Center on Innovation & Improvement

Targeted school improvement efforts focused on rapid change for the lowest performing schools need to establish early and tangible indicators of positive change. Absent clear evidence of progress, state and district leaders charged with directing school improvement efforts must require school leaders to examine their strategies and make necessary mid-course corrections. Identifying leading indicators of change and subsequently making necessary adjustments can significantly accelerate rapid improvement success rates (Hassel & Hassel, 2009).

Assessment results, at the classroom, school, district, or state level are established components of current federal and state accountability systems. Yet, annual assessments are a relatively blunt instrument. Furthermore, they don't provide school leaders or instructional personnel with timely information that can influence real-time school operations and classroom practice. Therefore, states and districts need to establish a systematic way of collecting and using a variety of information to inform its district and school personnel about whether positive progress is being made toward improving student learning.

There is not an established base of literature related to leading indicators of change, but lessons gleaned from the cross-sector research on effective turnaround initiatives and emerging research on statewide systems of support provide insight upon which states and districts can build unique leading indicator systems. Research on turnaround efforts inside and outside education indicates that effective turnaround leaders engage in a consistent set of actions that in combination drive dramatic improvement. Of note for leaders charged with documenting and reporting progress, successful turnaround leaders choose "a few high priority goals with visible payoffs and use early success to gain momentum, motivate staff, and dis-empower naysayers" (Kowal, Hassel, & Hassel 2009, p. 4). These wins focus on key leverage points that lead to dramatic improvements in school performance that will eventually be confirmed on state assessments. Examples of early wins that could serve as tangible indicators of positive change include: 1) boosting attendance and decreasing disciplinary rates in the first two months of the school year; 2) demonstrating significant increases in achievement as documented in formative assessments in a specific academic area such as "aiming by the end of the first semester to have 90 percent of fifth graders on track to make grade level by year's end (Kowal, Hassel, & Hassel 2009. p. 4). The converse of early wins are school conditions that predict later failure (Hassel & Hassel 2009). Potential examples of early indicators of failure are high mobility of strong teachers, persistent low staff morale, and ongoing or escalating school discipline issues.

In *Evaluating the Statewide System of Support with Rubrics, Explanations, and Exemplars*, the Center on Innovation & Improvement established 42 indicators to guide the development, implementation, and evaluation of each state's system of support. Examples of indicators are: 1) strong data system that district and school personnel can utilize to inform decisions that positively impact instruction and curriculum and 2) established process for using state assessment results to provide differentiated services for schools, especially those identified as continuously failing.

These early indicators are not the final measure of progress, but they serve as key evidence that school leaders are taking the steps necessary to lead to positive academic growth. Absent evidence of positive change, state and district leaders need to proactively assess the degree to which the specified change strategy is in fact changing the curriculum or instruction in the chronically low-performing school identified for corrective action. Rather than waiting three to five years for lack of or limited evidence of positive change, states and districts should encourage rapid retry of alternative approaches (e.g., replace turnaround leader or external provider) (Hassel & Hassel 2009).

Action Principles

For State

1. Identify indicators of positive change and pinpoint school conditions that predict later failure.
2. Provide districts with means to measure leading indicators (e.g., formative assessments or state data systems that allow districts to track student attendance and discipline referrals in real time).
3. Develop policies that encourage rapid retry efforts when rapid improvement efforts fail.
4. Provide political cover to districts tracking leading indicators of positive change and when necessary, engaging in rapid retry efforts.
5. Anticipate some failures on road to dramatic improvement and build a pipeline of school turnaround and transformation leaders, as well as external providers (e.g., charter management organizations and education management organizations).

For District

1. Track indicators of positive change and pinpoint school conditions that predict later failure.
2. Measure leading indicators (e.g., formative assessments or state data systems that allow districts to track student attendance and discipline referrals in real time).
3. Anticipate need to try again when rapid improvement efforts fail.
4. Engaging in rapid retry efforts when failure occurs, do not allow schools to languish for three to five years absent clear indicators of progress that will dramatically improve student outcomes.
5. Cultivate pipeline of school turnaround and transformation leaders as well as external providers (e.g., charter management organizations and education management organizations).

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Sustaining Reforms

Center on Innovation & Improvement

Districts and schools that have implemented change efforts and begun witnessing a positive trajectory in student achievement and other reform goals must implement structures and engage in processes and behaviors that produce a continuous improvement orientation (Redding, 2006). After a typical three-year implementation, "the deterioration of research-based practices adopted during the implementation period is often rapid or immediate" (Redding, 2006, p. 28). To prevent such deterioration, successful reform must not be viewed as the attainment of some plateau that is simply an improvement over what existed before, but as a point in ongoing adjustments aimed at achieving still higher goals. In many low-performing schools, some improvement, while laudable, still leaves many or most students academically disadvantaged. Also, the educational environment is always in flux: Leadership, teachers, staff, students, state-mandated academic standards, school and community demographics, and availability of community resources are subject to change. It is critical that these do not result in a reduction in student achievement.

Sustainability should be considered in the initial planning for the reform. During the planning, school leaders must communicate the need for the reform, identify resources and capabilities (including community partners) for sustaining it, and convey to the school community the appropriateness and the effectiveness of the (research-based) efforts. Further, leaders must anticipate changes in personnel, contraction of resources, or revisions to policy that would threaten the practices, structures, and attitudes that resulted in improved achievement. The reform plan should provide for contingencies that respond to such threats. From the beginning, the purpose and workings of the reform must be well understood by and have the support of school faculty and of the community and its leaders, including political leaders and the school board, in order to be sustained (Cawelti & Protheroe, 2007; Murphy, 2007; Wong, 2007). Engaging a wide representation of the community in the planning process is one way to help ensure long-term viability of the reform.

Given these multiple variables, leadership must take a "systems orientation" (Redding, 2007b) to maintaining positive outcomes. Given some change, leaders must ask what in the system can respond to or compensate for that change. In addition, in order to make good decisions about what needs to change, effective collection and use of data are key to sustaining improvement. Consequently, time dedicated to data analysis and planning by teams at the district and school levels should be sufficient, routine, and non-negotiable.

Behavioral change is the key to school improvement. Regulation can change organizations, but an effective change agent must also offer incentives, build capacities, and provide opportunities for the people in the system to learn and change (Redding, 2007a). To be fully realized and lasting, reform efforts must be accompanied by a fundamental cultural shift throughout the local education community, a shift that results in new mindsets and accompanying behaviors among administrators, teachers, and students. Such cultural changes will require ongoing support (CCSRI, 2009), and a degree of accountability, with incentives for positive change.

Action Principles

For State

1. Develop means to identify reforms worth sustaining (i.e., differentiate substantial progress leading to changes in outcomes from incremental process changes).
2. Allocate resources—human and fiscal—to support sustainability of reforms beyond years two and three.
3. Develop systems to document and codify successful and sustainable reforms.
4. Disseminate lessons learned from successful reforms.

For District and School

1. Invite faculty and community input in the planning stage and subsequently seek continued support and involvement of all stakeholders to ensure continuity of the reform effort.
2. Create contingency plans to address possible changes in staffing and resources.
3. Ensure that new staff is committed to adopting the reform measures.
4. Provide dedicated time and space for teams of educators to seek ways to maintain reforms and identify strategies for further improvement.
5. Provide professional development to educators on how to engage in ongoing problem solving, thereby establishing a culture geared toward continuous improvement.

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