

# **Utilizing Integrated Resources to Implement the School and District Improvement Cycle and Supports**

Guidance for Schools, Districts, and State Education Agencies

## THE COUNCIL OF CHIEF STATE SCHOOL OFFICERS

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### **Utilizing Integrated Resources to Implement the School and District Improvement Cycle and Supports Guidance for Schools, Districts, and State Education Agencies**

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The goal of the BSCP is to build the capacity of SEAs to support local educational agencies (LEAs or districts) and schools, by providing high quality information, tools, and implementation support to help them shift from a “compliance-based” to a “performance-oriented” approach.



The goal of the CST is to provide technical assistance and to identify, synthesize, and disseminate research-based practices and emerging promising practices that will lead to the increased capacity of SEAs to support districts in turning around their lowest-performing schools.

We also would like to thank the support, efforts and advice from Sam Redding, Academic Development Institute, Building State Capacity and Productivity Center, and Center on School Turnaround; Elbert Harvey, Arkansas Department of Education; Karen Ruple, Michigan Department of Education; Shawna Moran, Oregon Department of Education; Susan Travilla, Florida and the Islands Comprehensive Center; and Dani Steuber, Carrie Heath Phillips and Monica Taylor, Council on Chief State School Officers.

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## INTRODUCTION

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With the passing of the Every Student Succeeds Act (ESSA) roles in the school improvement process shifted, with the state education agency (SEA) and the local education agency (LEA) taking a more pronounced role over that of the federal government. SEAs have more flexibility and decision-making authority to determine how to identify and support schools and districts that need improvement. LEAs have a greater role in supporting schools identified as in need of significant improvement (Comprehensive or Targeted Support and Intervention, or CSI and TSI schools, respectively) and are required to develop and implement comprehensive support and improvement plans for CSI schools (§1111(d)(1)(B) of ESSA). Now more than ever, LEAs need support taking on their new roles in significantly improving outcomes for all students.

Improving school performance is largely a process of reducing the gap between actual practice and the most effective practice. In other words, change in practice is the core driver of school improvement. This is true for an SEA and LEA as much as a school, or even an individual. Improvement is a process of knowing what is working and what needs to change, developing a sound plan, including more effective practices in the plan, implementing the plan, and using data to make timely adjustments to improve outcomes. Recently, several sound resources were created by three organizations to help SEAs, LEAs and schools improve. It is critical to integrate these resources to support improvement efforts with a focus on effective practice, responsive supports, and performance in a systemic way. Although the focus of this document is on *school* improvement, the approach is to improve the *system* that includes the SEA, LEA, and school, and the improvement processes generally apply to all three levels.

This document draws from and integrates five resources into a concise and practical guide for constructing a “Strategic Performance Network”—a cohesive system of support for improvement—explicating the roles of the SEA, LEA, and school. The Strategic Performance Network is a performance-management approach that interconnects the SEA, LEA, and schools to address necessary improvements. The resulting system of support aligns with the ideas presented in *CCSSO Principles of Effective School Improvement Systems* which are based on current research, evidence, and experience in building effective systems to address low performing schools (CCSSO, 2017).

- *Strategic Performance Management (SPM)* (Redding & Layland, 2015; 2017) provides a step-by-step process through which an SEA or LEA can implement an ongoing system of strategic performance management. This document draws from the SPM methodology to guide organizations in setting direction for improvement.
- *Strategic Performance for a Branch* (Redding & Layland, 2017) provides a step-by-step process through which a branch or strand of work in an SEA or LEA, such as its system of support for school improvement, can implement an ongoing system of strategic performance management. This document draws upon the concepts of strengthening a strand within an organization.
- *Casting a Statewide Strategic Performance Net* (Layland & Redding, 2017) is used in this document to connect the SEA, LEA, and schools in a system with structured autonomy for each organizational entity with interlaced data that informs responsive supports for improvement.

- *Using Needs Assessments for School and District Improvement: A Tactical Guide* (Corbett & Redding, 2017) informs the creation and use of a needs assessment to identify a school's areas of strength and weakness relative to effective practices enumerated in the *Four Domains of Rapid School Improvement* (The Center on School Turnaround, 2017). It also outlines the steps in an improvement process.
- *Four Domains of Rapid School Improvement* (The Center on School Turnaround, 2017) provides effective practices at SEA, LEA, and school levels relative to school improvement, with research citations.

A Strategic Performance Network encourages and facilitates each organization's (SEA, LEA, or school) self-determined, aspirational pursuit of better education within a structure of common data elements, coded categories (domains/practices), and routine reporting cycles that enable a collaborative and supportive system capable of making course corrections and providing responsive supports to address implementation issues.

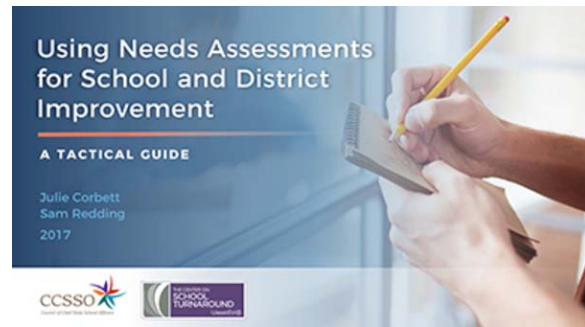
*Structured autonomy*, a key concept in this approach to the improvement cycle, emphasizes the importance of granting each organization (SEA, LEA, or school) the opportunity to set its own direction and fit improvement strategies to its own context while structuring the needs assessment, planning, and reporting processes within common categories that facilitate interlaced data and responsive supports.

|  |  |   |
|--|--|---|
|   |   |    |
| <p><b>SPM for an SEA or LEA</b></p> <p>An organization that engages in building a strategic performance management system.</p> | <p><b>SPM for a Branch or Strand of Work</b></p> <p>A branch, division, or strand of work that involves people across an SEA or LEA.</p> | <p><b>SPM for SEA, LEAs, and Schools</b></p> <p>A system of SPM that connects work through interlaced data and responsive supports.</p> |

**The Building State Capacity and Productivity Center**  
[Strategic Performance Management](#)



**The Center on School Turnaround**  
[Four Domains of Rapid School Improvement](#)



**CCSSO and the Center on School Turnaround**  
[Using Needs Assessment for School and District Improvement](#)

The process described in the following pages was developed as a result of a multi-day workshop at the School and District Improvement State Collaborative on Assessment and Student Standards (SDI SCASS) meeting sponsored by the Council of Chief State School Officers; in consultation with Sam Redding of the Academic Development Institute, the Building State Capacity and Productivity Center, the Center on School Turnaround; and SEA representatives who lead school and district improvement work. The process and document has been endorsed by both the Center on School Turnaround and the Building State Capacity and Productivity Center as a way to braid key resources together to implement an improvement cycle within a broader system of support.

Included herein are tools and templates, as well as coaching tips, to assist an SEA, LEA, or a school through the improvement cycle. A coach can be a critical partner providing feedback, asking probing questions, and gathering information from discussions so leadership and staff can engage in the improvement cycle in a meaningful and productive way. The term “coach” is defined broadly, and could be an SEA staff member, an SEA-hired contractor, an LEA staff member, or an external consultant, any of whom support the school and the LEA in implementing the improvement cycle. Tools and tips are identified by the symbols below and are located in the Appendix.



COACHING TIPS are provided to assist in facilitating the improvement process and building capacity of the organization to sustain improvement efforts.



TOOLS are provided to assist in the school improvement process. These tools can be modified as needed to meet the needs of school and districts.

The accompanying tools include:

- Tool A. School Improvement Planning Template
- Tool B. Coaching Techniques and Questions
- Tool C. LEA Self-Assessment
- Tool D. Fishbone Template for Root Cause Analysis

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## STRATEGIC PERFORMANCE NETWORK FOR SCHOOL IMPROVEMENT

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The process of improvement is not for the faint of heart. Needs and weaknesses can be readily identified, but selecting effective practices to address the needs is more difficult. The real tough work is the implementation of practices and knowing if those practices are indeed changing adult behaviors and practices, many of which are deeply rooted. Effective practices have little chance of being implemented without significant supports. The SEA, LEA, and school each plays a role in providing supports for the school to improve and in doing so, each level engages in its own improvement process and elevates the performance of the system as a whole. School improvement is not possible without embedding it within a broader system of support. Utilizing the five resources listed above in an integrated way creates a Strategic Performance Network: a system of support with each organization (SEA, LEA, or school) claiming its share of autonomy, and determining its organizational goals, strategies, performance measures, and actions. These core elements are structured so that implementation and performance data can flow between the state, district, and school, making possible responsive supports. The SEA itself adheres to the same principles of continuous improvement as districts and schools. The strategic performance process generates useful, timely data to guide decision-making and course correction within and across each organization.

In *Casting a Strategic Performance Net*, Layland and Redding (2017) write:

*The crux of [this] approach is that performance can be strategically managed across many organizations at different levels of the system (state, district, school, for example) if their plans and operational procedures include common elements. Note that this system does not dictate the content of the work, for example the goals chosen, or the strategies employed. It is the structure of a process that results in routine flow of two kinds of data:*

- *Implementation data in the regular performance reviews of progress status for actions and milestones;*
- *Outcome data in the performance measures for strategies and goals.*

*This operational structure and data protocol establish high-quality performance management in each organization (state, district, school) and enable routine reporting of each organization's implementation and performance. Routine and consistent reporting makes possible precise targeting of supports and interventions, adjustment in course, innovation, and efficient allocation of resources. (p. 4)*

The common structural elements in a Strategic Performance Network are: mission, goals, goal performance measures, strategies, strategy performance measures, milestones, and actions. The improvement cycle and reporting routines are universal across levels of the system and the organizations within it. Interlacing coded data from implementation progress reports (actions and milestones) and performance (goal and strategy performance measures) facilitate course corrections and responsive supports.

In fact, the *Four Domains for Rapid School Improvement* (CST, 2017) offers an ideal structure for coding



data in a statewide system of support. As strategies are selected for improvement plans (see below), they can be coded to align with specific practices identified in *Four Domains*. In *Four Domains*, a total of twelve practices are described, with implementation examples at the state, district, and school levels.

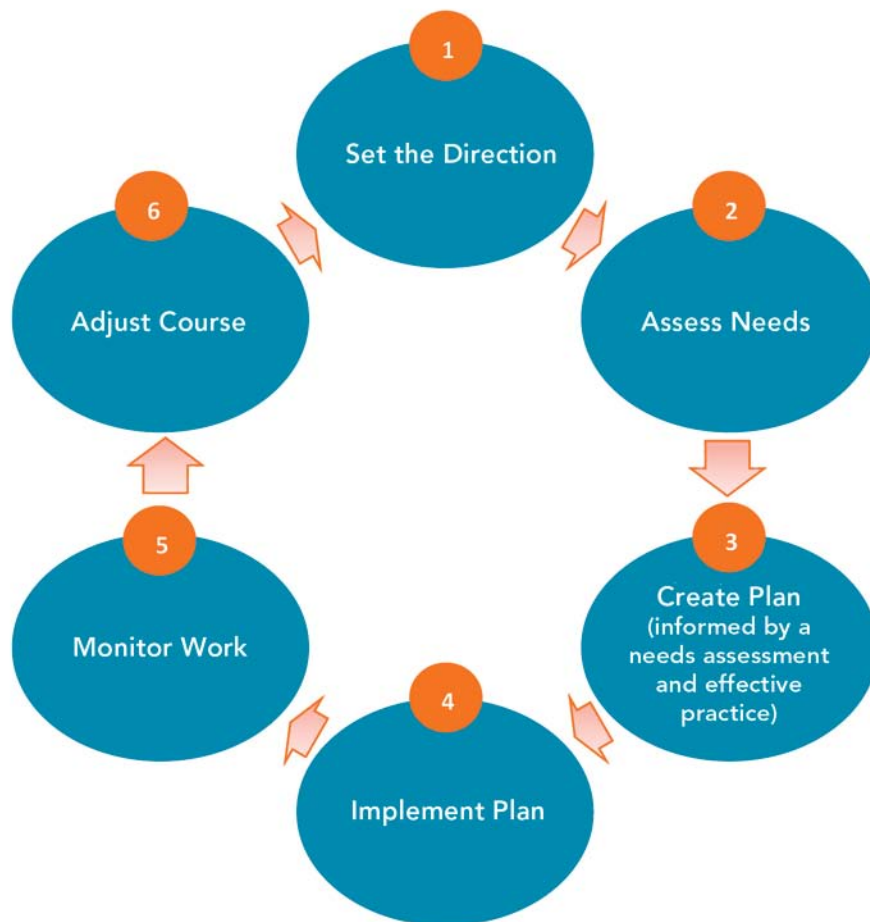
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## THE IMPROVEMENT CYCLE

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In *Using Needs Assessment for School and District Improvement Tactical Guide* (2017) Corbett & Redding describe a five-step improvement process that is applicable for any organization. We have added one additional step, drawn from the publications on strategic performance management: set direction. Setting the direction becomes the foundation upon which an improvement cycle is built. The direction, for our purposes, is comprised of the organization’s mission, goals, and goal performance measures, as well as a statement of purpose for its improvement efforts. Figure 1 displays the improvement cycle used in this document.

Figure 1: Modified version of the improvement cycle from *Using Needs Assessment for School and District Improvement Tactical Guide* (Corbett & Redding, 2017, p25).



## 1. SET THE DIRECTION

*“You have to be very careful if you do not know where you are going, because you might not get there” Yogi Berra*

An SEA, LEA, or school needs to know where it is and where it wants to be in order to improve. Effective organizations have a clear direction that informs the work of all employees. The direction for an SEA, LEA, or school includes, at a minimum, a mission statement, student-focused goals, and goal performance measures.

The **mission** describes what the organization does and for whom. Many SEAs, LEAs, and schools have mission statements; however most were created some time ago. If this is the case, the mission statement should be reviewed and updated so it is relevant now and for the future.

An organization’s **goals** should be ambitious and aspirational. For an SEA, LEA, or school, the goals are student-focused and apply to all students. The goals are not restricted by time and do not include measures; goals do; however the goal, goal measures, and other parts of the improvement process together form the critical parts of a SMART (specific, measurable, attainable, relevant, and timely) goal. The strategies provide specificity of direction; details on the performance measures; milestones and actions that establish the timeline; and details that demonstrate the relevancy and attainability of a SMART goal.

Adhering to the principle of structured autonomy, each organization creates its own goals in pursuit of better education for the students within its purview. Because goals are student-focused and apply to all students, common themes will likely run through the goals selected by the SEA, LEA, and school. In the example below, the common theme is “each student meeting or exceeding their growth targets”. The SEA emphasizes benchmarks, the LEA emphasizes times of transition between schools, and the school is focused on meeting or exceeding growth targets each year. This is just one example of how common themes are found, even when each organization constructs its own unique goals.

### EXAMPLE GOALS

|              |   |
|--------------|---|
| SEA Goal:    | <i>Each student will meet or exceed readiness benchmarks along the pathway to graduate prepared for college, career, and community engagement.</i>        |
| LEA Goal:    | <i>Each student will meet his or her growth targets to successfully move to the next school level (elementary, junior or middle school, high school).</i> |
| School Goal: | <i>Each student will meet his or her growth targets each year.</i>  |

An **explanation** telling why a goal was created and its importance to students, families, and educators is developed for each goal. The explanation provides the context and reasoning for the goal in terms that all stakeholders can understand. The explanation is a critical piece when sharing the strategic direction with others. A **glossary** is also built throughout direction-setting to define terms and acronyms that stakeholder and others may not understand and provide a common language for everyone.

A **goal performance measure** is a means by which progress toward a goal is gauged and includes indicators, data sources, baseline data, and targets. An indicator is one way to gauge progress toward the goal, as found in the data source. The baseline performance is reported for each indicator and annual targets are established for at least two years. The SEA, LEA, and school might have indicators and data sources in common if pursuing similar goals; however, the data would apply to different populations, so the baselines and targets would vary. Targets should be identified for two years and adjusted annually (Redding & Layland, 2015). Table 1 displays an example of measures for the goals stated above.

Table 1: Example of Goal Performance Measures

|               | Indicator   | Data Source                                    | Baseline Data          | Year 1 Target | Year 2 Target |
|---------------|---|--|------------------------|---------------|---------------|
| <b>SEA</b>    | The percentage of students that meet growth goals each year               | State assessments using the state growth model | 82%                    | 4% increase   | 5% increase   |
|               | The percentage of students graduating from high school                    | Adjusted cohort graduation rate                | 71%                    | 3% increase   | 5% increase   |
| <b>LEA</b>    | The percentage of students that meet growth goals each year               | State assessments using the state growth model | 64%                    | 5% increase   | 10% increase  |
|               | The percentage of students who move to the next level prepared to succeed | Competency-based performance portfolios        | Gr 5: 68%<br>Gr 8: 61% | At least 70%  | At least 80%  |
| <b>School</b> | The percentage of students that meet growth goals each year               | State assessments using the state growth model | 18%                    | At least 30%  | At least 50%  |

Defining the **purpose** of the improvement process is not the same as describing the mission of the organization. Typically a purpose statement for the improvement process takes the form of a strategy and is composed as a Theory of Action using the **If we... then... and...** structure: **If** we (effective practice the SEA, LEA, or school will implement) . . . , **then** (the impact of the practice on the LEA, school, or constituents of a school), **and** (impact on student performance expressed as one of the student-focused goals) (Layland & Redding, 2016). The purpose is communicated to internal and external stakeholders, conveying the importance and urgency of the improvement work.

Note the example purpose statement provided is a Theory of Action for an LEA’s improvement efforts.

An organization’s direction is used as a filter for all work. When in place, staff knows how their work influences or impacts student-focused goals and commits to continuous capacity building

**EXAMPLE GOALS**

**If** we implement a system of school improvement with key common elements, **then** schools will have the responsive supports they need to effectively implement their improvement plans, **and** student outcomes will improve.

and improvement. As noted in *Turnaround Leadership Domain* (Center on School Turnaround, 2017), turnaround leaders set the direction and expectations, and articulate the commitment to school turnaround. The leadership team in any organization should review the current direction. If the mission, goals, and measures already exist, are they still relevant? Does the mission statement still apply? Has the “for whom” changed? Do the goals reflect what the organization wants for its current and future students? Are the performance measures and baselines appropriate to the goals? Are the targets rigorous yet attainable? The leadership team also engages all employees and stakeholders in the process of sharing and gathering feedback and making needed revisions to finalize and communicate the direction to others. Each person needs to own the direction and understand how his or her role supports the mission. Setting a direction is important for any organization and it is particularly critical for those seeking to make rapid improvement—as is the case for the lowest-performing schools. To improve rapidly, the school first needs to know where it is headed.

A system of support for improvement needs each organization (SEA, LEA, and school) to have its direction clearly stated and aligned to improving student outcomes. The overall purpose of improvement needs to be agreed upon and clearly articulated. Although there is a sense of urgency for improving low-performing schools, the time to set the correct direction is well spent, for “It is a mistake to think that moving fast is the same as actually going somewhere” (Goodier, retrieved from <https://www.goodreads.com/quotes/691461-it-is-a-mistake-to-think-that-moving-fast-is>, July 2017).



Asking probing questions, providing feedback, and collecting key conversation or discussion points can be very helpful to assist the leadership team (at all levels) focus on all students, create meaningful goals, and use key discussion and conversation points to build goal explanations.



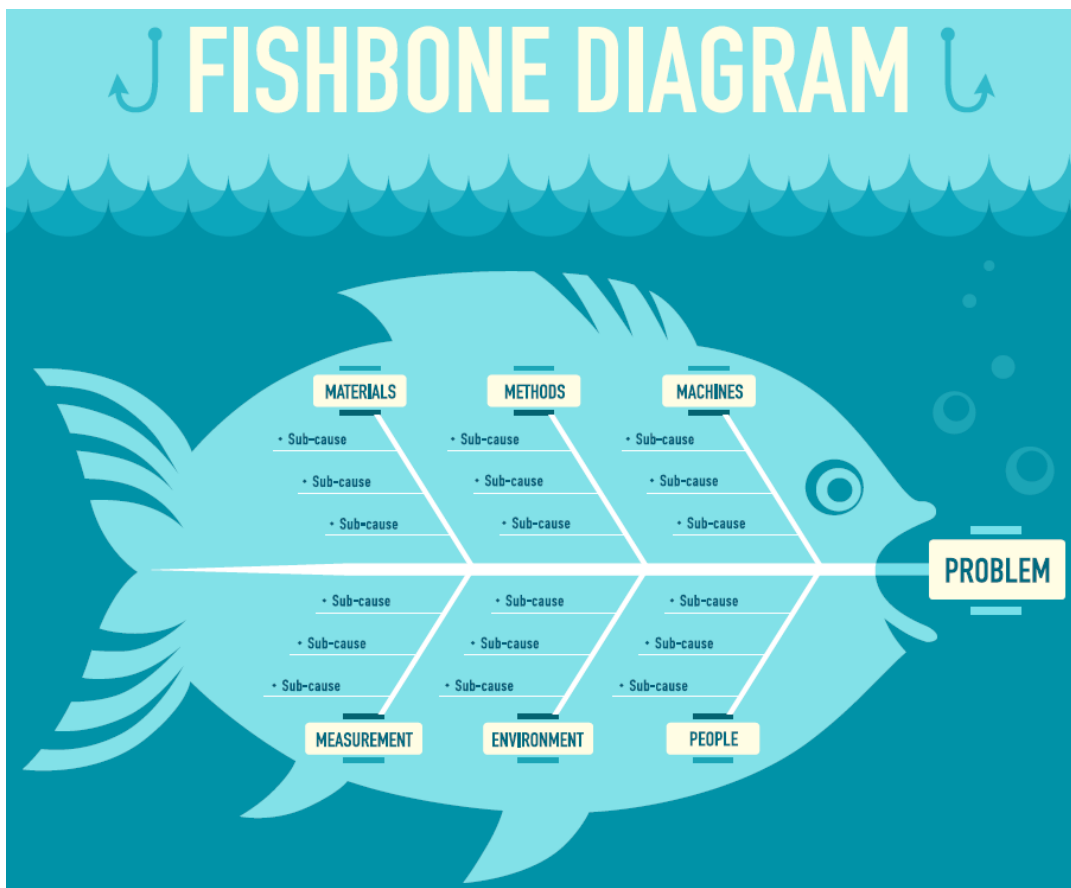
- Tool A - (School Improvement Plan Template) “At-A-Glance” section is used for setting the direction.
- Tool B - Coaching questions are provided for setting the direction.

## 2. ASSESS NEEDS

Once the direction with a sharp focus on improvement is set, a needs assessment is conducted. A needs assessment is a systematic process that is used to identify strengths and weaknesses within the context and constraints of the organization and dig deeper into root causes (Corbett & Redding, 2017). The needs assessment goes beyond student data to include data on the prevalence of effective practices. It includes a thorough examination of practices, processes, and routines related to the four domains that we know can rapidly improve low performing schools: Turnaround Leadership, Talent Development, Instructional Transformation, and Culture Shift, as well as strategic performance management principles.

The needs assessment can be comprehensive or segmented depending on its purpose and the context of the school and/or district. A comprehensive assessment is typically used at the LEA or school level, and assesses all aspects of the LEA or school, whereas a segmented assessment examines only one or a few aspects at a time, so that improvement actions can be more readily taken based on timely data (Corbett & Redding, 2017). A segmented needs assessment is especially useful in short-cycle improvement processes. All the segments together might constitute a comprehensive needs assessment. A root cause analysis is also part of the needs assessment process. Root cause is defined as “the deepest underlying cause or causes of positive or negative symptoms within any process that, if dissolved, would result in elimination or substantial reduction of the symptom” (Preuss, 2003, p. 3). A root cause analysis addresses the problem (weak demonstration of an effective professional practice), rather than the symptom (low student achievement), eliminates wasted effort, conserves resources, and informs strategy selection (Preuss, 2003). There are several resources available to conduct a root cause analysis. Two of the most common methods are the “5Whys” model or the Fishbone Diagram. Figure 2 displays graphics of these two models. Identifying the root cause will help determine which practices are most appropriate to address weaknesses. *Root Cause Analysis: A School Leader’s Guide to Using Data to Dissolve Problems* (Preuss, 2013), provides additional examples specific to schools.

Figure 2: Example Methods for Root Cause Analysis





Ask probing questions whenever a cause is identified (Why do we think this is a cause? Where is the evidence to support this?). This will assist participants in peeling back the layers to get to the root cause. It is easy for the conversation to become negative or hopeless. Ask questions and provide feedback so the focus is on “actionable” causes. Finally, facilitate the process of prioritizing the causes in each area.

| EXAMPLE 5Whys ROOT CAUSE |   |
|--------------------------|---|
|                          | Symptom: Low student math performance in seventh grade.   |
| <b>Why</b>               | <i>Students aren't learning and applying math concepts.</i>   |
| <b>Why</b>               | <i>Math teachers lack instructional strategies and pedagogy to provide adequate instruction.</i>      |
| <b>Why</b>               | <i>Two teachers are new and one is a long term substitute.</i>  |
| <b>Why</b>               | <i>There is high teacher turnover at the school.</i>  |
| <b>Why</b>               | <i>School culture is not supportive of new staff and the new induction program is not sufficient.</i> |



- Tool A - The School Improvement Plan Template “Needs Assessment” section captures key information from the needs assessment.
- Tool B - Coaching questions are provided for the needs assessment.
- Tool C - The LEA Self-Reflection to Support School Improvement may be used to determine readiness to engage in school improvement work or identify areas to further analyze through a needs assessment.
- Tool D – Fishbone Template for Root Cause Analysis is provided for the root cause analysis.

### 3. CREATE A PLAN

A rigorous, yet attainable plan is created based on the needs assessment and root cause analysis. The plan includes strategies (effective practices), milestones (implementation indicators), actions (steps to the milestone), outputs (produced in completing actions), and a timeline (for completion actions and meeting of milestones). The plan focuses on what the SEA, LEA, or school does to address improvement needs—including its own and the organizations it supports. At the SEA level, the focus is on supporting LEAs in their own improvement and in supporting the improvement of their schools. At the LEA level, the focus is on determining and providing responsive support to schools. At the school level, the focus is on implementing effective practices to rapidly improve results for students as specified in their goals and goal performance measures.

#### Strategies

Strategies describe the work the organization will undertake in pursuit of its student-focused goals. A strategy should take two or more years to implement, often much longer (Layland & Redding, 2016). If a strategy can be accomplished in one year, then it is too narrow and is most likely a useful milestone within a broader strategy. Strategies are powerful, high leverage work that builds capacity and changes practice, behavior, and belief so students are more successful. One bold strategy can have more impact than a litany of poorly implemented strategies.

Each strategy is composed as a theory of action (or logic model): **if we** (the work we will do), **then** (the direct or short term impact on the organizations or people we directly impact) **and** (their impact on students) (Redding & Layland, 2015). The “**if**” part of the statement describes or is aligned to the evidence-based practice that the SEA, LEA, or school will implement (for example, practices found in *Four Domains for Rapid School Improvement*). The “**then**” part refers to the people directly impacted by the strategy (for example, an SEA strategy most likely impacts LEAs and perhaps schools). The final “**and**” part relates back to a student-focused goal. Writing a strategy as a theory of action helps to clarify the role of each organization in ultimately impacting student performance.

*Four Domains for Rapid School Improvement* (CST, 2017) includes four domains, each with three practices. Each practice is described as it might be applied at the state, district, and school level. Organizations can suggest strategies that are aligned to these practices. If all organizations in a Strategic Performance Network (SEA, LEAs, and schools) are expected to routinely code strategies in improvement plans, analysis of various approaches to a practice is possible, and effective supports more efficiently devised. In *Four Domains*, a total of 12 practices are described, with examples of implementation at the state, LEA, and school levels.



## EXAMPLE DOMAIN-BASED STRATEGIES

Domain 4 Culture Shift - Practice 4c: Engaging students and their families in pursuing education goals

LEA Strategy: **If we** develop guidelines for Learning Acquisition Portfolios, then schools will have teachers, students, and families creating and using student learning portfolios, **and** each student will meet his or her growth targets to successfully move to the next school level (elementary, junior or middle school, high school).

Domain 3 Instructional Transformation - Practice 3c: Remove barriers and provide opportunities

School Strategy: **If we** engage our instructional teams in developing standards-aligned units of instruction and example lesson plans that personalize instruction, **then** teachers will plan and deliver standards-based personalized instruction, **and** each student will meet his or her growth targets each year.

Strategies flow directly from the intent of a student-focused goal and are informed by various sources of data, including needs assessments. Once set, a strategy is in place for multiple years, but its milestones may be annualized, and actions may be set to meet the annualized milestones. This allows for ready responses to new data, including new needs assessments.

### Strategy Performance Measures

Strategy performance measures focus on the **“then”** part of the strategy statement. If we do what we said we were going to do, how do we know it made a difference? Did we get a positive return on time and resources used? Identifying strategy measures is the hardest part of the plan development, particularly because they focus on and provide accountability for the impact of adult work. Strategy measures are a check for the efficacy of each strategy. If the **“then”** part of the strategy statement can't be measured, the strategy needs to be reworked.

## EXAMPLE STRATEGY MEASURES

| LEA  |                                  |          |          |          |
|--|----------------------------------|----------|----------|----------|
| Indicator  | Data Source                      | Baseline | Target 1 | Target 2 |
| Percentage of schools with all students using Learning Acquisition Portfolios.   | Annual School Performance Report | 26%      | 50%      | 90%      |
| School   |                                  |          |          |          |
| Indicator  | Data Source                      | Baseline | Target 1 | Target 2 |
| Percentage of teacher lesson plans that are standards-based and include at least one enhancement to personalize instruction. | Lesson Design Studio             | 26%      | 50%      | 80%      |



## Milestones and Actions

Milestones are the large pieces of work to implement the strategies. In fact, they are **indicators of strategy implementation**. Typically milestones represent one year's work, although in some planning systems their duration varies, consistent with the implementation trajectory of the strategy.

Actions are the incremental steps to complete a milestone. Actions include a timeline, resources including budgets, outputs, responsibilities, and collaborators (Redding & Layland, 2015).



Ask questions and provide feedback to assist the leadership team in thinking beyond what they already do. Yes, current work that supports the direction need to be represented through the strategies, milestones, and action, however with ESSA providing more flexibility, leaders should encourage outside-the-box thinking.



- Tool A - The School Improvement Plan Template includes a planning section for strategies, milestones, and actions.
- Tool B - Coaching questions are provided for creating the plan.

## 4. IMPLEMENT THE PLAN

Implementation is where the rubber meets the road, and depends a great deal on the quality of the rubber, so to speak. In a performance cycle, the organization regularly examines progress on actions and outputs leading to completion of strategy-aligned milestones. Staff meets monthly in teams that have been assigned responsibility for milestones and in groups working on actions to discuss progress, celebrate successes, and identify challenges and possible solutions. Monthly status reports are provided to the leadership team so they can provide support and make timely adjustments. Data from these reports can be aggregated and reported upstream also. For example, school-level data will provide information for the LEA (and, in some cases, the SEA) to gauge the supports the school might need at that point in time relative to the strategy and milestone. Similarly, the coded data can be aggregated across multiple schools in a district (or in a state) to provide an overall analysis of progress relative to particular domains and practices.



A process is needed for reporting and documenting monthly implementation status and making necessary adjustments for implementation to be successful. Each team should only take a few minutes to report their monthly status updates. Coaches can assist the school and/or LEA to create a system, preferably online, and routinely use the system. Facilitate the first few discussions so staff has the capacity to continue making meaningful progress and attaining results.



- Tool A - The School Improvement Plan Template includes progress reporting sections for milestones and actions.
- Tool B - Coaching questions are provided for implementation.

Monitoring is a critical part of a successful improvement process and occurs at all levels of the system. School leadership (typically a leadership team headed by the principal) monitors its own progress holding

people accountable for work being completed within the specified timelines. Monthly status reports on actions and outputs are reviewed and challenges are identified. Leaders use data to determine support for groups and individuals within the school and make necessary adjustments to stay on track. Building the capacity of the school to help itself is a critical role of the LEA. The LEA monitors and supports each school's progress to determine needed adjustments and immediate actions to address waning progress.

Common elements (goals, strategies, milestones, and actions) are coded based on the *Four Domains* and effective practices. The domain-based coding is then used to interlace implementation and performance data at each level and across levels (SEA, LEA, school) in the Strategic Performance Network to view progress and make timely adjustments to address implementation concerns. Interlaced data (common LEA and school elements) are used to provide responsive supports to LEAs and schools. Data also informs the effectiveness of the supports—if progress is back on track or accelerates as result of the support.

For example, if several school improvement processes focus on Domain 4—Culture Shift—as a priority, the strategies, milestones, and actions related to culture shift are coded as such, and also coded to specific practices within that domain. An LEA staff member who is knowledgeable in this practice could be assigned to support these schools. If multiple LEAs are focused on the same domain, the SEA could provide responsive supports to LEAs on family engagement. As a result, conversations on school improvement progress would be deeper and result in more timely action.

| EXAMPLE OF CODED DOMAIN-BASED STRATEGIES |  |  |   |  |
|--|--|--|---|--|
|  | Domain 1   | Domain 2   | Domain 3  | Domain 4   |
| School A                                 | 1a. Prioritize improvement and communicate urgency |  | 3c: Provide rigorous evidence-based instruction | 4c: Engaging students and their families in pursuing education goals |
| School B                                 | 1a. Prioritize improvement and communicate urgency |  | 3c: Remove barriers and provide opportunities   | 4c: Engaging students and their families in pursuing education goals |
| School C                                 |  | 2a: Recruit, develop, retain, & sustain talent<br>2b: Target professional learning |   | 4c: Engaging students and their families in pursuing education goals |

As the plan is implemented, the ongoing performance cycle is initiated, and responsive supports are provided at various levels of the system, the supports are also monitored for effectiveness. Monitoring questions could include: Who provided the supports and how? Were the supports provided in the manner that was intended? How were the supports utilized? How did the supports impact implementation? Both the provision and receipt of supports are built into the ongoing performance cycle and appear as milestones and actions.



During this phase, the monitoring conversation shifts from compliance requirements to implementation of strategies in pursuit of milestones, adjustments made or needed, and the provision of supports.



- Tool A. The School Improvement Plan Template includes progress reporting sections for strategies as well as milestones and actions.
- Tool B. Coaching questions are provided for monitoring.

## 6. ADJUST COURSE

As work progresses, implementation data are used to adjust actions and milestones to keep the work on track. The adjustments are monitored carefully to determine if they are positively impacting progress. Leadership teams at each organization make the final decisions regarding adjustments to the plan, but their decisions are not made in isolation. Monthly and quarterly reviews inform what adjustments are needed. The data are immediately available thank to the reporting routines built across the system. Discussions are more results-focused than compliance-driven, and data are used to provide responsive supports to build capacity rather than to punish. When adjustments are made, they are justified and communicated to staff. Adjustments are also communicated across the system, since an adjustment may impact a plan at another level in the system or organization within it.

**EXAMPLE ADJUSTMENT**

*After reviewing monthly status reports over two months, one district's progress was significantly lagging behind the others. Discussions with the district's leader and staff revealed a disconnect between the knowledge and skills of key staff and their assigned tasks. District leadership reached out to the SEA and professional learning was provided to staff on personalized learning. With support and guidance from the SEA, staff applied learning to better engage in their actions related to personalize learning.*

At the end of each year, the SEA, LEAs, and schools report on progress to stakeholders using implementation data (action and milestone completion and outputs) and performance data (results from goal and strategy performance measures). Schools report their progress to the LEA and their stakeholders and make necessary adjustments to continue to improve. LEAs use school data to make adjustments so their responsive supports are more effective. The SEA examines progress to review the entire system and make adjustments to its school improvement efforts.



The reason for different adjustments and their impact are important parts of the monitoring conversation, regardless of whether monitoring is conducted by the organization itself or by an external agent. Monitors should probe to ensure that adjustments were made for legitimate reasons and not because someone refused to do the work. Use the same line of questioning used in root cause analysis to get to the bottom of why the adjustment was needed and whether it addressed the issue in a way that positively impacted progress or results.



Tool B - Coaching questions are provided for monitoring.

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## REITERATIVE PROCESS

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The improvement cycle is ongoing, with opportunities for adjustment in implementation actions and milestones. Strategies take multiple years to implement, goals are aspirational, and the organization may get constantly closer to achieving them without ever fully getting there. At the end of each year, milestones are reviewed and those not completed are examined and adjusted based on data. Other milestones are added and action plans are detailed.

It is also important to tell the improvement story each year. By identifying or coding common elements using domain-based effective practices, progress can be viewed across the schools and districts. Work accomplishments and progress (implementation) can be shared alongside performance results. Both student and adult performance can be shared and the relationship between implementation and results can be explored.

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## CONCLUSION

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The Council of Chief State School Officers recently reemphasized the moral and economic imperatives of improving outcomes for “each and every student in each and every school” (CCSSO, 2017, p.1). SEAs, LEAs, and schools all have a role in advancing continuous improvement through a systematic improvement process. When high-quality resources are integrated to build a system of support, SEAs, LEAs, and school(s) can work together to implement effective practices that are proven to turn around low-performing schools. Creating a *Strategic Performance Network* allows SEAs, LEAs, and schools to utilize implementation data to make adjustments and provide responsive supports to increase the fidelity of effective practices. By initiating a Strategic Performance Network, every individual and organization at every level of the system engages in a continuous process of improvement and support. ESSA’s flexibility is an opportunity to renew a call to action to work together to ensure each child at every school gets the rigorous, equitable, and responsive education they deserve.

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# APPENDIX

## TOOL A: SCHOOL IMPROVEMENT PLANNING TEMPLATE

### AT-A-GLANCE

Date of Plan \_\_\_\_\_ Date of Update: \_\_\_\_\_ Update Summary: \_\_\_\_\_

School Name: \_\_\_\_\_ ESSA Status \_\_\_\_\_

City/County: \_\_\_\_\_ Zip Code: \_\_\_\_\_ Phone Number: \_\_\_\_\_

Principal: \_\_\_\_\_ Contact Information: \_\_\_\_\_

District: \_\_\_\_\_ Superintendent: \_\_\_\_\_ District Liaison/Contact: \_\_\_\_\_

Federal Accountability Designation: \_\_\_\_\_ Title I Status: \_\_\_\_\_

School Leadership  
team Members:

| Name | Position | Name | Position |
|------|----------|------|----------|
|      |          |      |          |
|      |          |      |          |
|      |          |      |          |

### SCHOOL STRATEGIC DIRECTION (REFER TO 1. SET THE DIRECTION SECTION)

Vision:

Mission:

Goal 1:

| Measure: | Indicator(s) | Data Source | Baseline | Target Year 1 | Target Year 2 | Target Year 3 |
|----------|--------------|-------------|----------|---------------|---------------|---------------|
|          | 1.           |             |          |               |               |               |
|          | 2.           |             |          |               |               |               |

Goal 2:

| Measure: | Indicator(s) | Data Source | Baseline | Target Year 1 | Target Year 2 | Target Year 3 |
|----------|--------------|-------------|----------|---------------|---------------|---------------|
|          | 1.           |             |          |               |               |               |
|          | 2.           |             |          |               |               |               |

Goal 3:

| Measure: | Indicator(s) | Data Source | Baseline | Target Year 1 | Target Year 2 | Target Year 3 |
|----------|--------------|-------------|----------|---------------|---------------|---------------|
|          | 1.           |             |          |               |               |               |
|          | 2.           |             |          |               |               |               |

Goal 4:

| Measure: | Indicator(s) | Data Source | Baseline | Target Year 1 | Target Year 2 | Target Year 3 |
|----------|--------------|-------------|----------|---------------|---------------|---------------|
|          | 1.           |             |          |               |               |               |
|          | 2.           |             |          |               |               |               |

| Priority Area<br>(based on Needs Assessment) | Strategy | Indicator | Milestones | Timeline |
|--|----------|-----------|------------|----------|
| 1:   | 1.1:     |           | 1.1.1.     |          |
|  |          |           | 1.1.2.     |          |
|  | 1.2:     |           | 1.2.1.     |          |
|  |          |           | 1.2.2.     |          |
| 2:   | 2.1:     |           | 2.1.1.     |          |
|  |          |           | 2.1.2.     |          |
|  | 2.2:     |           | 2.2.1.     |          |
|  |          |           | 2.2.2.     |          |
| 3:   | 3.1:     |           | 3.1.1.     |          |
|  |          |           | 3.1.2.     |          |
|  | 3.2:     |           | 3.2.1.     |          |
|  |          |           | 3.2.2.     |          |
| 4:   | 4.1:     |           | 4.1.1.     |          |
|  |          |           | 4.1.2.     |          |
|  | 4.2:     |           | 4.2.1.     |          |
|  |          |           | 4.2.2.     |          |

**Plan Signatures:** I have reviewed the plan and understand the work that we need to do together to fully implement the plan. (Signatories could include the principal, other school staff, teaching representatives, school board representative, LEA staff, parent/family advocates, and/or community members.)

| Name | Position | Improvement Plan Role | Signature |
|------|----------|-----------------------|-----------|
|      |          |                       |           |
|      |          |                       |           |
|      |          |                       |           |
|      |          |                       |           |
|      |          |                       |           |
|      |          |                       |           |
|      |          |                       |           |
|      |          |                       |           |
|      |          |                       |           |

**NEEDS ASSESSMENT** (REFER TO 2. ASSESS NEEDS SECTION FOR MORE INFORMATION)

The needs assessment identifies a school or district’s strengths, weaknesses, opportunities, and threats related to rapid school improvement (see [Four Domains of Rapid School Turnaround](#), Center on School Turnaround, 2017). An analysis of the data is conducted to identify the root cause of the weaknesses. This critical information is then used to select effective practices and create strategies to address the root causes. Complete the following items related to the needs assessment (see [Using Needs Assessments for School and District Improvement: A Tactical Guide](#), Corbett & Redding, 2017).

**ELEMENTS** (INDICATE THE ELEMENTS INCLUDED IN NEEDS ASSESSMENT)

- Demographics:  student  community  personnel  other: \_\_\_\_\_
- LEA or SEA policies and supports:  operations  learning infrastructure  support for school improvement
- Student outcomes/performance:  assessments  graduation rates  post-secondary success
- Accountability metrics  other: \_\_\_\_\_
- Student engagement:  attendance  behavior  other: \_\_\_\_\_
- Student opportunities:  enrollment/participation in various programs  other: \_\_\_\_\_  
 equity of access to quality instruction  other: \_\_\_\_\_
- Personnel policy and procedures (e.g., recruitment, hiring, placement, development, evaluation, differentiation, advancement, termination)
- Professional practice (e.g., leadership and decision-making, leadership development, planning, curriculum, instruction, family/community engagement, student support services)
- Climate and culture (e.g., student and adult perceptions, stakeholder engagement)
- Performance management routines (e.g., collecting implementation data, monitoring progress,
- Vendor/partner practices and outcomes (e.g., do contracts include performance management provisions?)
- Other: \_\_\_\_\_  
 \_\_\_\_\_

| How was the needs assessment, including the root cause analysis, completed and who was involved? | How was stakeholder input included? |
|--|-------------------------------------|
|  |                                     |



**Data Analysis** (refer to Root Cause Analysis in 2. assess needs section)

|               |          |   |
|---------------|----------|---|
| Strengths     | Evidence | What can be leveraged to move us closer to our goals? |
|               |          |   |
| Opportunities | Evidence |   |
|               |          |   |
| Weaknesses    | Evidence | What are the root causes?                             |
|               |          |   |
| Threats       | Evidence |   |
|               |          |   |

List top four priority areas based on the needs assessment. Although more can be identified, going deeper in improving fewer areas is often more effective.

- 1.
- 2.
- 3.
- 4.

## **PRIORITY PLANNING & REPORTING** (REFER TO 3. CREATE PLAN SECTION FOR MORE INFORMATION)

For each priority area specified above:

- Strategies are created. Strategies represent effective practices to be implemented by the school and relevant district staff. All strategies are written as a Theory of Action: If...then... and... If...then...and... **If** we (the effective practice the school implements), **then** (what teachers, staff, etc. will do as a result of the effective practice), **and** (what the students do as a result of the effective practice-student focused goal this strategy supports).
- Milestones are indicators of implementing the strategies.
- For each milestone, action plans are developed detailing the incremental steps in completing a milestone.
- Reporting includes implementation (actions and the outputs finished, milestones completed) and results data (strategy and goal measures)
  - o Monthly Action Status Reporting should be completed and reviewed by the school leadership team. Any needed adjustments are made to keep the work on track.
  - o Quarterly reporting is shared with the district and supports are discussed and added or modified as needed.
  - o At least once a semester, milestone completion should be reviewed and adjustments made to ensure milestones are completed by the end of the school year.
  - o Annually data from strategies and goals are reviewed to determine if targeted results were seen. Recommendations for next year's plan are discussed and planning adjusted based on the recommendations.
- The interlaced data (implementation and results) are used to identify responsive supports needed to accomplish the plan and make the needed improvements.
- Supports can be both internal and external and include those needed and received from the district, the state education agency, or from external vendors or contractors.

Each priority area is listed below and includes planning and reporting.

**PRIORITY 1**

Strategy 1.1: *(Edit to include school-identified strategies)* **If** we (the effective practice the school implements), then (what teachers, staff, etc. will do as a result of the effective practice), **and** (what the students do as a result of the effective practice/student focused goal this strategy supports).

Strategy Performance Measures: (measuring the **"then"** part of the statement-the adult behavior)

| Indicator | Data Source | Baseline | Target Year 1 | Target Year 2 |
|-----------|-------------|----------|---------------|---------------|
|           |             |          |               |               |
|           |             |          |               |               |
|           |             |          |               |               |

Milestone 1.1.1:

| Actions  | Anticipated Outputs | Timeline | Resources/<br>Budget | Person Responsible | Collaborators |
|----------|---------------------|----------|----------------------|--------------------|---------------|
| 1.1.1.1  |                     |          |                      |                    |               |
| 1.1.1.2. |                     |          |                      |                    |               |
| 1.1.1.3  |                     |          |                      |                    |               |
| 1.1.1.4  |                     |          |                      |                    |               |

Strategy 1.2: **If** we (the effective practice the school implements), then (what teachers, staff, etc. will do as a result of the effective practice), **and** (what the students do as a result of the effective practice/student focused goal this strategy supports).

Strategy Performance Measures: (measuring the **"then"** part of the statement-the adult behavior)

| Indicator | Data Source | Baseline | Target Year 1 | Target Year 2 |
|-----------|-------------|----------|---------------|---------------|
|           |             |          |               |               |
|           |             |          |               |               |
|           |             |          |               |               |

Milestone 1.2.1:

| Actions  | Anticipated Outputs | Timeline | Resources/<br>Budget | Person Responsible | Collaborators |
|----------|---------------------|----------|----------------------|--------------------|---------------|
| 1.2.1.1  |                     |          |                      |                    |               |
| 1.2.1.2. |                     |          |                      |                    |               |
| 1.2.1.3  |                     |          |                      |                    |               |
| 1.2.1.4  |                     |          |                      |                    |               |

## REPORTING

### Implementation Data

| Strategy 1.1                    | 1st Semester |             | 2nd Semester |             |
|---------------------------------|--------------|-------------|--------------|-------------|
| Milestones Completed (%)        |              |             |              |             |
| Milestones Behind Schedule      |              |             |              |             |
| Cause & Adjustments Made        |              |             |              |             |
| Milestone 1.1:1                 | 1st Quarter  | 2nd Quarter | 3rd Quarter  | 4th Quarter |
| Actions Completed (%)           |              |             |              |             |
| Outputs Completed (list)        |              |             |              |             |
| Actions on Time (%)             |              |             |              |             |
| Actions Behind Schedule (%)     |              |             |              |             |
| Cause & Adjustments Made        |              |             |              |             |
| Resources/Budget Used           |              |             |              |             |
| Additional Information/Comments |              |             |              |             |

| Strategy 1.2                    | 1st Semester |             | 2nd Semester |             |
|---------------------------------|--------------|-------------|--------------|-------------|
| Milestones Completed (%)        |              |             |              |             |
| Milestones Behind Schedule      |              |             |              |             |
| Cause & Adjustments Made        |              |             |              |             |
| Milestone 1.2.1:                | 1st Quarter  | 2nd Quarter | 3rd Quarter  | 4th Quarter |
| Actions Completed (%)           |              |             |              |             |
| Outputs Completed (list)        |              |             |              |             |
| Actions on Time (%)             |              |             |              |             |
| Actions Behind Schedule (%)     |              |             |              |             |
| Cause & Adjustments Made        |              |             |              |             |
| Resources/Budget Used           |              |             |              |             |
| Additional Information/Comments |              |             |              |             |

### Performance Data

| Strategy     | Indicator | Target | Annual Progress | Explanation & Needed Adjustments |
|--------------|-----------|--------|-----------------|----------------------------------|
| Strategy 1.1 |           |        |                 |                                  |
| Strategy 1.2 |           |        |                 |                                  |

## SUPPORTS

List any support(s) provided by the district, state, or other organizations. Identify how the supports were used and how effective the supports were, based on data (include any relevant data in the explanation if it is available).

| Supports | Provider | How were supports used? | How effective were the supports? |
|----------|----------|-------------------------|----------------------------------|
|          |          |                         |                                  |
|          |          |                         |                                  |
|          |          |                         |                                  |
|          |          |                         |                                  |
|          |          |                         |                                  |

## PRIORITY 2

Strategy 2.1: *(Edit to include school-identified strategies)* **If** we (the effective practice the school implements), then (what teachers, staff, etc. will do as a result of the effective practice), **and** (what the students do as a result of the effective practice-student focused goal this strategy supports).

Strategy Performance Measures: (measuring the **"then"** part of the statement/the adult behavior)

| Indicator | Data Source | Baseline | Target Year 1 | Target Year 2 |
|-----------|-------------|----------|---------------|---------------|
|           |             |          |               |               |
|           |             |          |               |               |
|           |             |          |               |               |

Milestone 2.1.1:

| Actions  | Anticipated Outputs | Timeline | Resources/<br>Budget | Person Responsible | Collaborators |
|----------|---------------------|----------|----------------------|--------------------|---------------|
| 2.1.1.1  |                     |          |                      |                    |               |
| 2.1.1.2. |                     |          |                      |                    |               |
| 2.1.1.3  |                     |          |                      |                    |               |
| 2.1.1.4  |                     |          |                      |                    |               |

Strategy 2.2: **If** we (the effective practice the school implements), then (what teachers, staff, etc. will do as a result of the effective practice), **and** (what the students do as a result of the effective practice/student focused goal this strategy supports).

Strategy Performance Measures: (measuring the **"then"** part of the statement/the adult behavior)

| Indicator | Data Source | Baseline | Target Year 1 | Target Year 2 |
|-----------|-------------|----------|---------------|---------------|
|           |             |          |               |               |
|           |             |          |               |               |
|           |             |          |               |               |

Milestone 2.2.1:

| Actions  | Anticipated Outputs | Timeline | Resources/<br>Budget | Person Responsible | Collaborators |
|----------|---------------------|----------|----------------------|--------------------|---------------|
| 2.2.1.1  |                     |          |                      |                    |               |
| 2.2.1.2. |                     |          |                      |                    |               |
| 2.2.1.3  |                     |          |                      |                    |               |
| 2.2.1.4  |                     |          |                      |                    |               |

## REPORTING

### Implementation Data

| Strategy 2.1                    | 1 <sup>st</sup> Semester |                         | 2 <sup>nd</sup> Semester |                         |
|---------------------------------|--------------------------|-------------------------|--------------------------|-------------------------|
| Milestones Completed (%)        |                          |                         |                          |                         |
| Milestones Behind Schedule      |                          |                         |                          |                         |
| Cause & Adjustments Made        |                          |                         |                          |                         |
| Milestone 2.1:1                 | 1 <sup>st</sup> Quarter  | 2 <sup>nd</sup> Quarter | 3 <sup>rd</sup> Quarter  | 4 <sup>th</sup> Quarter |
| Actions Completed (%)           |                          |                         |                          |                         |
| Outputs Completed (list)        |                          |                         |                          |                         |
| Actions on Time (%)             |                          |                         |                          |                         |
| Actions Behind Schedule (%)     |                          |                         |                          |                         |
| Cause & Adjustments Made        |                          |                         |                          |                         |
| Resources/Budget Used           |                          |                         |                          |                         |
| Additional Information/Comments |                          |                         |                          |                         |

| Strategy 2.2                    | 1 <sup>st</sup> Semester |                         | 2 <sup>nd</sup> Semester |                         |
|---------------------------------|--------------------------|-------------------------|--------------------------|-------------------------|
| Milestones Completed (%)        |                          |                         |                          |                         |
| Milestones Behind Schedule      |                          |                         |                          |                         |
| Cause & Adjustments Made        |                          |                         |                          |                         |
| Milestone 2.2.1:                | 1 <sup>st</sup> Quarter  | 2 <sup>nd</sup> Quarter | 3 <sup>rd</sup> Quarter  | 4 <sup>th</sup> Quarter |
| Actions Completed (%)           |                          |                         |                          |                         |
| Outputs Completed (list)        |                          |                         |                          |                         |
| Actions on Time (%)             |                          |                         |                          |                         |
| Actions Behind Schedule (%)     |                          |                         |                          |                         |
| Cause & Adjustments Made        |                          |                         |                          |                         |
| Resources/Budget Used           |                          |                         |                          |                         |
| Additional Information/Comments |                          |                         |                          |                         |

### Performance Data

| Strategy     | Indicator | Target | Annual Progress | Explanation & Needed Adjustments |
|--------------|-----------|--------|-----------------|----------------------------------|
| Strategy 2.1 |           |        |                 |                                  |
| Strategy 2.2 |           |        |                 |                                  |

## SUPPORTS

List any support(s) provided by the district, state, or other organizations. Identify how the supports were used and how effective they were based on data (include any relevant data in the explanation if it is available).

| Supports Needed | Supports Provided | Source (district and other organizations) | Effectiveness |
|-----------------|-------------------|---|---------------|
|                 |                   |   |               |
|                 |                   |   |               |
|                 |                   |   |               |
|                 |                   |   |               |

## PRIORITY 3

Strategy 3.1: *(Edit to include school-identified strategies)* **If** we (the effective practice the school implements), **then** (what teachers, staff, etc. will do as a result of the effective practice), **and** (what the students do as a result of the effective practice/student focused goal this strategy supports).

Strategy Performance Measures: (measuring the **"then"** part of the statement/the adult behavior)

| Indicator | Data Source | Baseline | Target Year 1 | Target Year 2 |
|-----------|-------------|----------|---------------|---------------|
|           |             |          |               |               |
|           |             |          |               |               |
|           |             |          |               |               |

Milestone 3.1.1:

| Actions  | Anticipated Outputs | Timeline | Resources/<br>Budget | Person Responsible | Collaborators |
|----------|---------------------|----------|----------------------|--------------------|---------------|
| 2.1.1.1  |                     |          |                      |                    |               |
| 2.1.1.2. |                     |          |                      |                    |               |
| 2.1.1.3  |                     |          |                      |                    |               |
| 2.1.1.4  |                     |          |                      |                    |               |



Strategy 3.2: **If** we (the effective practice the school implements), then (what teachers, staff, etc. will do as a result of the effective practice), **and** (what the students do as a result of the effective practice/student focused goal this strategy supports).

Strategy Performance Measures: (measuring the **"then"** part of the statement/the adult behavior)

| Indicator | Data Source | Baseline | Target Year 1 | Target Year 2 |
|-----------|-------------|----------|---------------|---------------|
|           |             |          |               |               |
|           |             |          |               |               |
|           |             |          |               |               |

Milestone 3.2.1:

| Actions  | Anticipated Outputs | Timeline | Resources/<br>Budget | Person Responsible | Collaborators |
|----------|---------------------|----------|----------------------|--------------------|---------------|
| 3.2.1.1  |                     |          |                      |                    |               |
| 3.2.1.2. |                     |          |                      |                    |               |
| 3.2.1.3  |                     |          |                      |                    |               |
| 2.2.1.4  |                     |          |                      |                    |               |

## REPORTING

### Implementation Data

| Strategy 3.1                    | 1st Semester |             | 2nd Semester |             |
|---------------------------------|--------------|-------------|--------------|-------------|
| Milestones Completed (%)        |              |             |              |             |
| Milestones Behind Schedule      |              |             |              |             |
| Cause & Adjustments Made        |              |             |              |             |
| Milestone 3.1:1                 | 1st Quarter  | 2nd Quarter | 3rd Quarter  | 4th Quarter |
| Actions Completed (%)           |              |             |              |             |
| Outputs Completed (list)        |              |             |              |             |
| Actions on Time (%)             |              |             |              |             |
| Actions Behind Schedule (%)     |              |             |              |             |
| Cause & Adjustments Made        |              |             |              |             |
| Resources/Budget Used           |              |             |              |             |
| Additional Information/Comments |              |             |              |             |

| Strategy 3.2                    | 1st Semester |             | 2nd Semester |             |
|---------------------------------|--------------|-------------|--------------|-------------|
| Milestones Completed (%)        |              |             |              |             |
| Milestones Behind Schedule      |              |             |              |             |
| Cause & Adjustments Made        |              |             |              |             |
| Milestone 3.2.1:                | 1st Quarter  | 2nd Quarter | 3rd Quarter  | 4th Quarter |
| Actions Completed (%)           |              |             |              |             |
| Outputs Completed (list)        |              |             |              |             |
| Actions on Time (%)             |              |             |              |             |
| Actions Behind Schedule (%)     |              |             |              |             |
| Cause & Adjustments Made        |              |             |              |             |
| Resources/Budget Used           |              |             |              |             |
| Additional Information/Comments |              |             |              |             |

*Results Data*

| Strategy     | Indicator | Target | Annual Progress | Explanation & Needed Adjustments |
|--------------|-----------|--------|-----------------|----------------------------------|
| Strategy 3.1 |           |        |                 |                                  |
| Strategy 3.2 |           |        |                 |                                  |

**SUPPORTS**

List any support(s) provided by the district, state, or other organizations. Identify how the supports were used and how effective the supports were, based on data (include any relevant data in the explanation if it is available).

| Supports Needed | Supports Provided | Source (district and other organizations) | Effectiveness |
|-----------------|-------------------|---|---------------|
|                 |                   |   |               |
|                 |                   |   |               |
|                 |                   |   |               |
|                 |                   |   |               |

## PRIORITY 4

Strategy 4.1: *(Edit to include school-identified strategies)* **If** we (the effective practice the school implements), then (what teachers, staff, etc. will do as a result of the effective practice), **and** (what the students do as a result of the effective practice/student focused goal this strategy supports).

Strategy Performance Measures: (measuring the **"then"** part of the statement/the adult behavior)

| Indicator | Data Source | Baseline | Target Year 1 | Target Year 2 |
|-----------|-------------|----------|---------------|---------------|
|           |             |          |               |               |
|           |             |          |               |               |
|           |             |          |               |               |

Milestone 4.1.1:

| Actions  | Anticipated Outputs | Timeline | Resources/Budget | Person Responsible | Collaborators |
|----------|---------------------|----------|------------------|--------------------|---------------|
| 4.1.1.1  |                     |          |                  |                    |               |
| 4.1.1.2. |                     |          |                  |                    |               |
| 4.1.1.3  |                     |          |                  |                    |               |
| 4.1.1.4  |                     |          |                  |                    |               |

Strategy 4.2: **If** we (the effective practice the school implements), then (what teachers, staff, etc. will do as a result of the effective practice), **and** (what the students do as a result of the effective practice/student focused goal this strategy supports).

Strategy Performance Measures: (measuring the **"then"** part of the statement/the adult behavior)

| Indicator | Data Source | Baseline | Target Year 1 | Target Year 2 |
|-----------|-------------|----------|---------------|---------------|
|           |             |          |               |               |
|           |             |          |               |               |
|           |             |          |               |               |

Milestone 4.2.1:

| Actions  | Anticipated Outputs | Timeline | Resources/Budget | Person Responsible | Collaborators |
|----------|---------------------|----------|------------------|--------------------|---------------|
| 4.2.1.1  |                     |          |                  |                    |               |
| 4.2.1.2. |                     |          |                  |                    |               |
| 4.2.1.3  |                     |          |                  |                    |               |
| 4.2.1.4  |                     |          |                  |                    |               |

## REPORTING

### Implementation Data

| Strategy 4.1                    | 1st Semester |             | 2nd Semester |             |
|---------------------------------|--------------|-------------|--------------|-------------|
| Milestones Completed (%)        |              |             |              |             |
| Milestones Behind Schedule      |              |             |              |             |
| Cause & Adjustments Made        |              |             |              |             |
| Milestone 4.1:1                 | 1st Quarter  | 2nd Quarter | 3rd Quarter  | 4th Quarter |
| Actions Completed (%)           |              |             |              |             |
| Outputs Completed (list)        |              |             |              |             |
| Actions on Time (%)             |              |             |              |             |
| Actions Behind Schedule (%)     |              |             |              |             |
| Cause & Adjustments Made        |              |             |              |             |
| Resources/Budget Used           |              |             |              |             |
| Additional Information/Comments |              |             |              |             |

| Strategy 4.2                    | 1st Semester |             | 2nd Semester |             |
|---------------------------------|--------------|-------------|--------------|-------------|
| Milestones Completed (%)        |              |             |              |             |
| Milestones Behind Schedule      |              |             |              |             |
| Cause & Adjustments Made        |              |             |              |             |
| Milestone 4.2.1:                | 1st Quarter  | 2nd Quarter | 3rd Quarter  | 4th Quarter |
| Actions Completed (%)           |              |             |              |             |
| Outputs Completed (list)        |              |             |              |             |
| Actions on Time (%)             |              |             |              |             |
| Actions Behind Schedule (%)     |              |             |              |             |
| Cause & Adjustments Made        |              |             |              |             |
| Resources/Budget Used           |              |             |              |             |
| Additional Information/Comments |              |             |              |             |

### Results Data

| Strategy     | Indicator | Target | Annual Progress | Explanation & Needed Adjustments |
|--------------|-----------|--------|-----------------|----------------------------------|
| Strategy 4.1 |           |        |                 |                                  |
| Strategy 4.2 |           |        |                 |                                  |

## SUPPORTS

List any support(s) provided by the district, state, or other organizations. Identify how the supports were used and how effective the supports were, based on data (include any relevant data in the explanation if it is available).

| Supports Needed | Supports Provided | Source (district and other organizations) | Effectiveness |
|-----------------|-------------------|---|---------------|
|                 |                   |   |               |
|                 |                   |   |               |
|                 |                   |   |               |
|                 |                   |   |               |

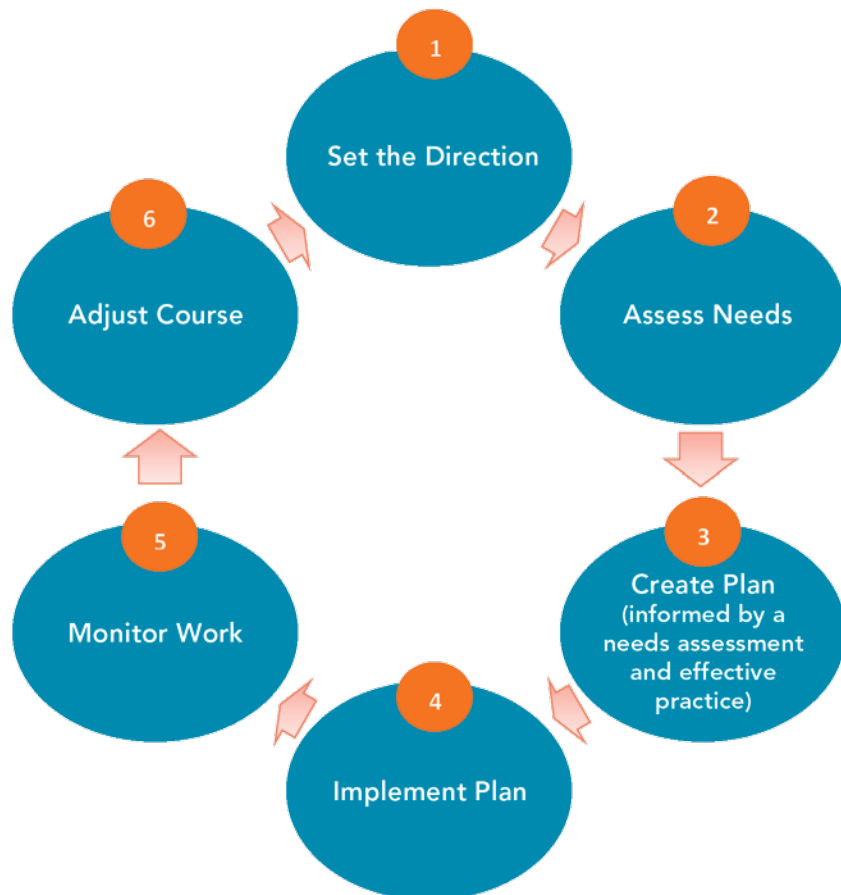
\*Additional pages (e.g., budget and compliance assurances) are then added as attachments to the plan. The budget would show evidence of braiding funds from multiple sources and other strategic leveraging of resources.

## TOOL B: COACHING TECHNIQUES AND QUESTIONS

### INTRODUCTION

The role of a coach throughout this process is to facilitate deep discussion and ask probing questions to push thinking and challenge old and entrenched ideas. Keep in mind, coaching is not limited to a “coach”, but also includes members of the school improvement leadership team and others constructively criticizing and expanding their own thinking. Although coaching tips are included in the foundational document, *Utilizing Integrated Resources to Implement the School and District Improvement Cycle and Supports* (Layland and Corbett, 2017), this protocol offers additional suggestions and coaching questions for the school improvement process for SEAs, LEAs, or schools. It is based on resources created by the Council of Chief State School Officers, the Center on School Turnaround, and the Building State Capacity and Productivity Center. The coaching guidance follows the steps in a school improvement cycle modified from the cycle created by Corbett & Redding in *Using Needs Assessments for School and District Improvement: A Tactical Guide* (2017) and displayed in Figure 1. Additional sources include the *Four Domains of Rapid School Improvement* (The Center on School Turnaround, 2017) and *Casting a Net of Strategic Performance Management* (Layland & Redding, 2016).

Figure 1. School Improvement Cycle



## 1. SET THE DIRECTION

This step is about building the overall foundation for improvement by setting the school or district's strategic direction with a keen focus on school improvement. A strategic direction includes at a minimum: a mission, goals, and goal performance measures. The mission describes what the organization does and for whom. Goals are student-focused and should be ambitious and aspirational representing the ultimate desired state of educating all students. Goal performance measures are the means by which progress toward a goal is gauged. Each measure includes an indicator, data source, baseline data, and targets for at least two years. There can be more than one indicator for each goal measure. For a district or state education agency, a purpose statement is included which defines the general work and anticipated impact on districts or schools. More information on setting a direction can be found in *Casting a Statewide Strategic Performance Net* (Layland & Redding, 2016).

Facilitating the school or district leadership team to create or revisit its direction can result in a strong vision and commitment to school improvement. The role of the coach is to pose probing questions to encourage the team to think forward, ensure that all students are represented in what is developed, and create a sense of urgency for the improvement work. The following questions can assist the process of setting a direction.

### MISSION

#### *Preparation*

Review what the district or school currently has related to its mission, goals, measures, etc. Is there a current strategic plan in place? Does it include a mission statement and goals? When were the mission and goals created or last reviewed? Who was engaged in the process? Who is included on the school's or district's leadership team? Does the team include key roles in addition to the superintendent or principal? How often do they meet to discuss the school's strategic plan, implementation steps, and monitoring processes? Does each member of the leadership team understand his or her role in the improvement process? Has the importance and urgency of the improvement work been clearly communicated to all staff?

#### *Coaching Techniques and Questions*

##### Vision/Mission

- What is the vision for the students, families, and communities served by the school/district?
- If a mission exists:
  - Does the mission still represent the purpose of the school/district?
  - How does the mission describe what the school/district does and for whom?
  - How does it relate to the concept of improvement?
  - How is it relevant to current and future stakeholders?
- If creating a new mission:

- o What is the purpose of the school/district (beyond the improvement work)?
- o What does the school/district do and for whom?
- o How does the mission align with the vision of what is wanted for students, families, and communities?

## Goals

- What do the data say about student performance and success?
- What are the aspirations for students in schools/districts?
- What are the top three or four goals for the students (i.e. if we achieved our goal, would every student be successful beyond high school because of his or her educational experience)?
- If goals already exist:
  - o Are the goals student-focused?
  - o How do they align with aspirations for students?
  - o How relevant are they given today's context? Are they relevant for future students?
  - o How do the goals apply to all students, particularly those attending schools identified for improvement (i.e. Comprehensive or Targeted Support and Intervention Schools, or other state identifications)?
  - o What would students or families say about the goals?

## Goal Measures

- Does each goal measure include at least one indicator, a data source, baseline data, and targets for at least two years?
- Are there any goals for which there is no measure?
- How do the measures provide information about student progress and school improvement?
- How do the measures inform the school/district about its progress?
- Are the measures reasonable?
- Do they protect the privacy of students and their families?
- If the measure does not exist, can it reasonably be created, collected and analyzed?
- How are targets rigorous yet attainable?
- How might data be shared and used with staff? Students? Families? Districts? Schools? Communities? Other stakeholders?
- How do the goals and goal performance measures align with the school/district's mission?
- How do the goals together convey an urgency to improve?

## Purpose (for SEAs and LEAs)

- How does the purpose statement describe the work in which people across the agency would engage to support school improvement?
- Is the statement written as a Theory of Action? If not, how could it be stated in a way that describes the work (**If** we...), the anticipated impact or results on LEAs or schools (**then** LEA or school will...), **and** (the impact on student performance)?



- If the LEA or SEA actually did the work, would it result in a change at the LEA or school level, and will that change have a positive effect on student learning?
- How could the purpose statement be used to convey the importance and urgency of improving low performing schools?

## 2. ASSESS NEEDS

Assessing needs is a critical next step in creating the school or district improvement plan. Root cause analysis should be part of the process to peel back the layers of symptoms to get to an actionable cause. We say “actionable” because causes may be beyond the scope and influence of the school/district; the school/district needs to be able to act on the causes identified. A needs assessment may be created and completed by the school/district itself, the district, the state education agency (SEA), or by an outside partner. Regardless, time is required to analyze key areas related to the goals and determining priorities. We refer to the *Four Domains of Rapid School Improvement* because “the framework shares, in practical language, the critical practices of successful school turnaround in Four Domains, or areas of focus, that research and experience suggest are central to rapid and significant improvement: turnaround leadership, talent development, instructional transformation, and culture shift” (Center on School Turnaround, 2017).

The role of a coach during this phase of the improvement cycle is to encourage and facilitate a root cause analysis, so the leadership team not only identifies strengths and weakness, but also the root cause of each. It is also important for the team to discuss how to leverage strengths to capitalize on opportunities, and to identify both internal and external threats that may be the root of a weakness. Often times, the school improvement needs assessment process leads to analysis and implementation at the school level. Utilizing further root cause analysis may result in practices or policies at the district level that impact what happens in schools.

### *Preparation*

There are many models for conducting a root cause analysis. Two are mentioned in the foundation document: the Fishbone Diagram and the 5Whys. Others possible techniques include Change Analysis, Barrier Analysis, Force Field Analysis, and Kepner-Tregoe Problem Solving and Decision Making. Documents and videos demonstrating how to conduct a root cause analysis using these other techniques are available online. Determine the best method to use within the context of the practice and school or district.

### *Coaching Techniques and Questions*

- Utilize the needs assessment provided by the district or state.
- If a needs assessment is not provided, consider using the document *Using Needs Assessments for School and District Improvement: A Tactical Guide* (Corbett & Redding, 2017) to create, adapt, or review a needs assessment.
- If the school/district needs a starting point, the self-reflection tool *LEA Self-Assessment to Support School Improvement* (Corbett & Layland, 2017), could be used to identify possible areas to focus the needs assessment.

- Focus on the *Four Domains* first: turnaround leadership, talent development, instructional transformation, and culture shift, as these are critical practices based on research that are proven to impact school improvement.
- Keep asking “why?” and “what’s the evidence?” to push the team into thinking deeper about causes.
- As soon as a cause is identified, ask if it is actionable. This step determines those causes that are beyond the control or influence of the school/district with those that can actually be addressed. Some district-level causes may be actionable, but require the commitment and coordination with district leaders to do so (i.e. changing hiring policies for identified schools, or implementing district-required professional development).
- How is the cause identified? What evidence exists? Do the majority of stakeholders agree, including those who are not as verbose? How do we know?
- Root cause questions: Ask questions to move beyond money, time, and blame.
  - Is this a cause or a symptom?
  - When a cause is quickly identified, ask “why?” and “where is the evidence?”
  - Is the cause really at the root of the weakness? If not, dig deeper.
  - Are there any “elephants in the room” that prevent us from truly identifying the root cause?
  - Is the cause actionable by the school/district? If not why? Have we really gotten down to the root level?
  - Is the cause reflective of a lack of effective practices? If so, which ones are lacking?
- What do the results of the needs assessment tell us?
- How should the results be prioritized? Which causes are critical to moving us closer to realizing our goals?
- How do we share the results of the root cause analysis? Who else needs to be engaged in building a plan to address the needs and causes?

### 3. CREATE A PLAN

Creating a rigorous, yet attainable, plan with enough detail to actually carry out the work and hold responsible offices, departments, or teams accountable is challenging work. A plan includes strategies and measures aligned to goals, annual milestones or objectives, and actions that detail indicators, data sources, baseline data, and targets for at least two years. The most difficult part of creating the plan is developing the strategies and measures. Remember, a strategy should take two or more years to implement and quality is more important than quantity (Layland & Redding, 2016). The role of the coach is to ask probing questions to guide the leadership team in understanding the issues, selecting effective practices to address needs and root causes, and creating strategies and measures. There is a fine balance between creating a strong plan and spending so much time planning that implementation is delayed.

#### *Preparation*

Review the domains and effective practices in *Four Domains of Rapid School Improvement* (The Center on School Turnaround, 2017) and any focus areas the school/district should include. Practice creating a strategy and identifying possible measures to monitor that strategy.

## Coaching Techniques and Questions

- How does the needs assessment data inform the selection of effective practices?
- What are some possible practices that could address the identified actionable causes?
- Which of the possible practices align to the *Four Domains*?
- Are there effective practices currently being implemented? Are we seeing intended results? How do we know?
- If current practices are working, how do they support the goals? Should they be continued?
- If current practices are not working, how do we discontinue the practice in an effective way?
- Have we identified possible practices that go beyond what we are currently doing? How do they represent innovative thinking?
- What are the minimum conditions that need to be in place for the school/district to implement each effective practice?
- Are the minimum conditions in place or can they be reasonably met? If not, what are the consequences? Are there alternative practices that can lead to strategy implementation?
- Explain why the effective practice was selected and what the expected impact is? How does it support moving the school/district closer to realizing its goals?
- What is the evidence behind the practice?
- How can the practice and impacts be written as a Theory of Action?
- How will we know that each effective practice is making an impact? In other words, how do we measure the change in the school/district based on implementing the effective practice? If it cannot be measured that the strategy needs to be revised.
- How will we know if there is a positive return on investment by implementing the strategy?
- How do the milestones support the implementation of strategies?
- Is there a timeline for each milestone?
- What are the specific actions and timeline for completing each milestone?
- What resources, including budget and people, are needed to complete each action?
- What team, office, or division is leading the efforts and reporting progress on each milestone and related actions?
- What competencies (knowledge, skills, and talents) are needed to complete actions and milestones? How are the competencies represented through the people assigned to carry out the work?
- What support (e.g. people, skills, programs, vendors, funds) is needed to get the work started?
- For a state education agency or a district, how will supports be provided to meet the needs of each district or school as they implement their plans?
- How will the duration, frequency, methodology, and resources be modified to differentiate supports?
- Reflecting on the plan in its entirety, if we implement this plan as intended, will we get our desired results?
- Does the district's plan reflect its role in providing supports to schools? Does the SEA's plan reflect its role in providing support to districts?

## 4. IMPLEMENT THE PLAN

As the plan is implemented, pay attention to progress on a weekly, biweekly, or monthly basis. A coach can be a valuable resource for helping staff understand the work and use strategies to communicate, coordinate, and collaborate effectively to accomplish each action.

### *Preparation*

Review the plan and each team member's assignments. Review timelines, paying particular attention to the sequence of actions and milestones. Review resources and budgets and any necessary supports that may have been identified. The implementation discussions focus on both the work itself and the processes to support the work, including communications and collaboration.

### *Coaching Techniques and Questions*

- How are people made aware of the actions and milestones assigned to them?
- How are needed resources and supports being secured for the initial work?
- How does the schedule support the work?

#### Communication

- How is work and progress communicated to all staff throughout the school/district?
- How are timelines discussed so that relationships among actions and milestones are clearly communicated?
- What actions need to be completed first so others may begin?
- How are deliverables provided to others who may need them for later actionable items?
- How are staff assignments communicated?
- When people are needed from specific departments, how are the leaders of those offices or departments notified? Are collaborators identified based on need and competencies?

#### Collaboration

- What are the expectations related to collaboration? How are these communicated to staff?
- How does the culture of the school/district support or hinder collaboration?
- Is there a clear understanding of what collaboration means, and what it doesn't mean?
- How can staff build a shared understanding of collaboration?
- Who makes decisions related to collaboration? How do leadership and staff know when collaboration is needed and when it may hinder progress?
- Which existing processes and routines support collaboration? Are they effective?
- What are the barriers or challenges to collaboration and how are they being addressed?
- Is there a clear process in place to address collaboration issues that arise?

## 5. MONITOR WORK AND MAKE ADJUSTMENTS

Improvement plans are not static documents. They require ongoing monitoring and adjustments throughout the implementation process, and as the school's needs and district conditions change. Monitoring and reviewing progress is an important part of implementing a plan and occurs at multiple levels. The district and school monitor their own work while LEAs monitor each school's progress. The SEA monitors the work of LEAs in providing supports to schools to successfully implement their plans. Teams responsible for milestones meet weekly or bi-weekly to discuss progress, successes, and challenges. Team leaders and school and district leaders receive progress reports at least once a month. The leadership team meets bi-monthly or quarterly to review progress, discuss challenges, and make necessary adjustments to meet timelines. Key LEA leaders should also attend quarterly meetings to ensure that LEA-level actions are moving along as well.

Common elements within and across the SEA, districts, and schools are coded using domain-based practices. Common domain-based practices being implemented by schools and districts are labeled or clustered by the domain and practice. Coded data on actions, milestones, and strategies are analyzed to view progress across the network, identify challenges and progress trends, and identify supports to effectively respond to progress. The data are also used to determine if the responsive supports are working, and if not, why? Adjustments are then made to increase the effectiveness of implementation. The role of coaches and the monitoring process is to ask probing questions to determine the cause of waning progress and to develop solutions to get the work back on track.

### *Preparation*

Review plans and determine if any common domain-based practices are identified or coded. Review reported progress data along with planned timelines and anticipated impact and results. Note any concerns or irregularities.

### *Coaching Techniques and Questions*

- Tell me about the progress that has been made over the last week, month, quarter or year. Describe the successes as well as the challenges.
- What actions or milestones have been completed and how do we know?
- What led to the completion of these actions or milestones? What supported the progress and success?
- How often is progress reported and reviewed? Who is at the table for the discussions? Is this often enough to determine if adequate progress is being made to meet timelines? If not, how can the reviews and discussions occur more frequently?
- Who communicates with key school/district personnel and how often?
- What and how are data used to report progress and to identify needed adjustments or supports?
- How are decisions made about adjustments or supports? How are they communicated to others?
- How does the leadership team know if the adjustments or supports had a positive impact on progress?

- What actions and milestones are behind schedule? Why? What steps are being taken to get these actions back on track, or does the schedule require adjustment?
- What has been the impact of the completed work? How can we measure this impact?
- Is the work leading to the results we anticipated? Why or why not? What changes need to be made to get the desired results?
- What supports were provided by the SEA or LEA to assist implementation? Were the supports responsive to implementation and progress needs? Were they effective in addressing the needs? How do we know?
- What lessons have been learned thus far? How can the learning be used to improve implementation and results?

## TELL THE STORY

It is just as important to tell the improvement story as it is to do the work. By identifying or coding common elements using domain-based effective practices, progress can be viewed across the school/district. Work accomplishments and progress can be shared alongside performance results. Both student and adult performance can be shared and the relationship between implementation and results can be explored. The role of a coach is to assist the leadership team to plan, monitor, and report on the improvement story at least annually to staff and stakeholders.

### *Preparation*

Review any previous reports on plan implementation and results. Determine if routines are in place to create and disseminate annual progress and accomplishments to internal and external stakeholders.

### *Coaching Techniques and Questions*

- Is there a communications office or staff responsible for such reporting?
- What is the story to tell?
- How are progress and results reviewed annually?
- How is this communicated to the SEA? LEA? Staff? Families? Community members? Partners?
- Who is the audience? What is the most effective way to communicate the story to each audience?
- How is the story used to inform changes to the improvement plan, including additional strategies, milestones, and actions to continue the improvement work next year?
- How do we make decisions related to needed changes?
- Are there any gaps in processes and procedures that need to be filled as the work continues?
- How can discussions on improving the strategic performance network take place between the state and districts, and between the district and schools?

### **Reference:**

Layland, A. & Corbett, J. (2017). Utilizing integrated resources to implement the school and district improvement cycle and supports: Guidance for schools, districts and state education agencies. Washington DC: The Council of Chief State School Officers.

## TOOL C: LEA SELF-REFLECTION TO SUPPORT SCHOOL IMPROVEMENT

The LEA self-reflection is based on the *Four Domains of Rapid School Improvement* (Center on School Turnaround, 2017). The self-reflection guides an LEA through examining elements in their performance management system with a strong focus on supporting school improvement. The self-reflection should be completed by the leadership team, including key personnel and stakeholders. Sufficient time should be given to allow for honest discussions, examination of evidence, and consensus building on the current state of each element.

The self-reflection is a potential starting point that informs the LEA's direction and structure, and works to support school improvement. However, it is NOT a needs assessment. A needs assessment is a systemic process that "identifies a school's (and to some extent its LEA's) strengths, weaknesses, and the areas in which improvement is called for" (Corbett and Redding, 2017, p.6). The needs assessment is an essential first step in identifying and addressing the root causes of poor school performance. This self-reflection could be included as one piece of a more comprehensive needs assessment. Further information on needs assessments can be found in the Council for Chief State School Officers' and the Center on School Turnaround's [Using Needs Assessments for School and District Improvement: A Tactical Guide](#).

To use the self-reflection, read the element description, review the performance levels, circle or highlight the appropriate performance level, and then document evidence of performance. Note the strengths and weaknesses for each of the domains. Once each team member has completed the self-reflection, review the results together. If the results are sensitive or controversial, one team member or an outside entity could assemble the feedback and share the aggregate results from the entire team (which would allow for anonymity).

### 1. LEADERSHIP

| Element   | Consistently Low Performance   | Basic Performance                                   | Moderate Performance   | Consistently High Performance  | Evidence |
|---|--|---|--|--|----------|
| <b>1.a. Prioritize improvement and communicate urgency</b>  |  |   |  |  |          |
| 1a1. LEA leadership communicates the urgency of school improvement and assists personnel in connecting their work to supporting school improvement. | LEA leadership communicates about schools being identified as a Targeted or Comprehensive Support and Improvement school, or other state-identified determination. | And communicates the urgency of school improvement. | And engages LEA personnel in connecting their work to supporting school improvement. | And includes school and LEA improvement a key topic of every meeting linking a sense of urgency with current and future work of all personnel, students, families and the community. |          |

| Element   | Consistently Low Performance  | Basic Performance   | Moderate Performance  | Consistently High Performance   | Evidence |
|---|---|---|---|---|----------|
| 1a2. A collaborative leadership team representative of key roles across the agency is established.  | LEA leadership team is comprised of a superintendent and deputy superintendent. | And has representatives from key roles across the LEA.  | And has ongoing meetings with norms and processes to foster collaboration and clear decision-making.  | And monitors progress and makes timely adjustments as needed to address LEA and school improvement.   |          |
| 1a3. The LEA sets the overall strategic direction of the LEA (vision, mission, student focused goals, and goal performance measures) to guide improvement work.   | The LEA leadership team sets a direction with a stated vision and mission.      | And includes student-that includes focused goals and goal measures that are relevant to school improvement. | And ensure personnel And, team members know and can articulate the LEA's direction and how their work supports the direction.   | And uses the direction And, the direction acts as a filter for all projects, initiatives, and programs to address LEA and school improvement. |          |
| 1a4. The LEA has conducted a needs assessment in specific areas related to school improvement including leadership, talent development, instructional transformation and culture (i.e. <i>Four Domains of Rapid School Improvement</i> ). | The LEA leadership team completes a needs assessment.                           | And utilizes both qualitative and qualitative data.   | And uses root cause analysis to identify strengths and weakness related to the <i>Four Domains of School Improvement</i> : leadership, talent development, instructional transformation, and culture. | And includes a root cause analysis to identify the underlying actionable cause(s) of each weakness.   |          |
| 1a5. Policies, structures and expectations are in place to support the school improvement.  | Policies, structures and clear expectations are in place.                       | And support school improvement.   | And a collaborative team oversees policy development, structures and access to, school improvement data.  | And the team provides support in analysis and use of data to identify and make adjustments in school improvement plans.                       |          |
| <b>1b. Monitor short-and long-term goals</b>  |   |   |   |   |          |
| 1b1.Strategies (effective practices) for school improvement have been created based on root cause analysis of data.   | Strategies are identified.  | And represent effective practices from the <i>Four Domains of School Improvement</i> .                      | And each strategy is written as a theory of action ( <b>If we...then...and...</b> ) to express what the LEA will do, the anticipated impact on schools, and result on student-focused goals.          | And include strategy measures to measure the impact of LEA work (the <b>then</b> part of the strategy).                                       |          |



| Element  | Consistently Low Performance  | Basic Performance   | Moderate Performance  | Consistently High Performance  | Evidence |
|--|---|---|---|--|----------|
| 1b2. Milestones to implement and gauge progress on strategies have been created.   | Milestones are developed.   | And represent steps needed to implement the effective practices (strategies) to support school improvement. | And include actions to complete each milestone.   | And actions include timelines, outputs resources, responsible staff and collaborators.                 |          |
| 1b3. The LEA monitors implementation of the school improvement plans and make adjustments in personnel, programs, policies, and methods as needed to keep the effort on track. | School improvement plans are reviewed.                                | And common elements are identified or coded based on domains and effective practices.                       | And implementation data are used to make timely adjustments in personnel, programs, policies, and methods to keep progress on track.                          | And inform when swift interventions need to be made to address waning progress.                        |          |
| <b>1c. Customize and target supports to meet needs</b>   |   |   |   |  |          |
| 1c1. The LEA has a defined differentiated system of support to address school improvement needs.   | A system of support is in place.                                      | And reflects effective practices to support school improve.   | And includes differentiation in methodology, frequency, duration, and resources to address each school's improvement needs.                                   | And includes reviewing implementation data in response to supports, so needed adjustments can be made. |          |
| 1c2. The LEA grants school leaders reasonable autonomy to reallocate resources (e.g., personnel, funding, schedule) to address school priorities.                              | Clear expectations and procedures to allocate resources are in place. | And include a decision-making process to make resource allocation decision.                                 | And grants leaders in improvement schools reasonable autonomy to reallocate resources (e.g., personnel, funding, schedule) to address improvement priorities. | And includes examining the effectiveness of reallocations so timely needed adjustments can be made.    |          |

| Element  | Consistently Low Performance  | Basic Performance  | Moderate Performance  | Consistently High Performance   | Evidence |
|--|---|--|---|---|----------|
| <p>1c3.The LEA grants school leaders reasonable autonomy to make decisions to address school priorities.</p> | <p>LEA leadership communicates the importance of setting school priorities for improvement.</p> | <p>And grants school leaders reasonable autonomy to make decisions to address school priorities for improvement.</p> | <p>And provides additional flexibility for school leaders to decide on a few strategic priorities that could be early "wins".</p> | <p>And includes examining the effectiveness of the decisions in improving school performance, so timely needed adjustments can be made.</p> |          |
| <p><b>Strengths and Weaknesses in Leadership</b></p>   |   |  |   |   |          |

## TALENT DEVELOPMENT

| Element   | Consistently Low Performance   | Basic Performance   | Moderate Performance  | Consistently High Performance  | Evidence |
|---|--|---|---|--|----------|
| <b>2a. Recruit, develop, retain, &amp; sustain talent</b>   |  |   |   |  |          |
| 2a1. The LEA operates with a transparent system of procedures and protocols for recruiting, evaluating, rewarding, and replacing talent, so it has the capacity to carry out its mission. | There are recruitment and evaluation, procedures in place.                 | And differentiated rewards to support excellence.   | And procedures and protocols are part of a system for recruiting, evaluating, rewarding, and replacing talent based on needs.                     | And includes a level of transparency and access to data to address talent needs for school improvement.  |          |
| 2a2. The LEA, schools and communities work collaboratively to recruit, retain and match highly effective principals and teachers to schools based on need.                                | The LEA oversees the recruitment and retention of principals and teachers. | And matches principals and teachers to schools based on need.                                 | And collaborates with schools and communities in matching highly effective principals and teachers to school improvement needs.                   | And provides timely access to data to make needed changes, so staff has the competencies to carry out their role in school improvement.                |          |
| 2a3. The LEA and schools work collaboratively to implement an induction program to support new teachers and leaders in their first years of teaching and leading.                         | An orientation is provided to new employees.                               | And a teacher and principal induction program is in place.                                    | And includes collaboration with schools and other stakeholders to implement and periodically review the induction program.                        | And includes differentiated support for new teachers and leaders in their first years of teaching and leading at schools in improvement.               |          |
| <b>2b. Target professional learning opportunities</b>   |  |   |   |  |          |
| 2b1. The LEA has adopted or created professional learning standards or criteria to ensure professional learning is of high quality and is provided consistently.                          | Professional learning standards are in place.                              | And personnel understand, can articulate, and can relate the standards to school improvement. | And the standards are consistently used to provide high quality professional learning on effective practices for school improvement by LEA staff. | And staff support schools in using professional learning standards to select and provide high quality, relevant professional learning to school staff. |          |

| Element   | Consistently Low Performance   | Basic Performance   | Moderate Performance  | Consistently High Performance  | Evidence |
|---|--|---|---|--|----------|
| 2b2. The LEA aligns professional learning with identified needs, based on personnel evaluation, school performance, and student performance.                        | Professional learning is based on overall LEA needs.   | And personnel evaluation data are used to match professional learning to personnel needs.                   | And school and student performance data are used to match professional learning to school needs.  | And is prioritized based on school improvement needs.  |          |
| 2b3. The LEA supports schools in providing professional learning that is appropriate for individual teachers and personnel with different experience and expertise. | School improvement plans are reviewed to ensure that professional learning actions are tied to needs.                | And feedback is provided to schools to improve the quality of professional learning actions in their plans. | And supports are provided to help schools differentiate professional learning based on the experience and expertise of individual teachers and personnel. | And include supports to effectively evaluate the effectiveness of professional learning.                                       |          |
| <b>2c. Set clear performance expectations</b>   |  |   |   |  |          |
| 2c1. The LEA leadership team communicates clear goals for personnel performance aligned with the established evaluation system.                                     | An established evaluation system is in place and shared with all employees.  | And the system is used consistently by all to support personnel performance goals                           | And support is provided to identify schools to effectively utilize the system to address employee issues.   | And support is provided to hold leadership and staff accountable for meeting personnel performance goals.                      |          |
| 2c2. The LEA leadership team communicates clear expectations for school performance and improvement so students get the best education possible.                    | There are clear expectations for school performance and improvement so students receive the best education possible. | And all personnel know and can articulate the expectations for school performance and improvement.          | And LEA leaders communicate clear expectations for school performance and improvement to schools and communities.   | And LEA leaders continuously review and revise school improvement communications to better reflect the expectations as needed. |          |
| 2c3. The LEA and school leadership work collaboratively to facilitate swift exits of underperforming personnel to minimize further damage.                          | Procedures exist for corrective action for underperforming personnel.  | And include actions to address consistently low performing personnel in low performing schools.             | And includes collaboration with school leadership work to facilitate swift exits of underperforming personnel to minimize further damage.                 | And includes steps to quickly replace the exited personnel with effective staff to minimize further damage.                    |          |

| Element   | Consistently Low Performance | Basic Performance | Moderate Performance | Consistently High Performance | Evidence |
|---|------------------------------|-------------------|----------------------|-------------------------------|----------|
| <b>Strengths and Weaknesses in Talent Development</b> |                              |                   |                      |                               |          |

## 2. INSTRUCTIONAL TRANSFORMATION

| Element   | Consistently Low Performance  | Basic Performance  | Moderate Performance   | Consistently High Performance   | Evidence |
|---|---|--|--|---|----------|
| <b>3a. Diagnose and respond to student learning needs</b>   |   |  |  |   |          |
| 3a1. The LEA provides protocols to assist teachers drill down on individual student needs and create instructional action plans aligned to those needs.                       | Protocols and procedures to drill down on individual student needs are in place.  | And include samples to create instructional action plans aligned to individual student needs.  | And include professional learning on the use of protocols to create instructional action plans to address individual student needs.        | And include needed adjustments are made to the protocols and procedures based on evaluation data.   |          |
| 3a2. The LEA provides flexibility and supports in creatively using instructional time to meet the learning needs of students.   | Creative ways to extend instructional learning time to address student learning needs is actively explored.                 | And policies or procedures are revised to support schools in creatively extending and maximize instructional time to address student learning needs. | And guidance on effectively providing high quality instruction during extended learning time to address student learning needs is provided | And schools are held accountable for providing high quality instruction during the extended learning times.                                   |          |
| 3a3. The LEA provides access to data sources for teachers to be able to conduct student progress monitoring of student outcomes.  | LEA data procedures are in place to gather data student outcomes.   | And includes school access to the data.  | And includes guidance on using data to conduct progress monitoring of student performance.   | And includes resources to assist students and families in understanding progress monitoring of student performance.                           |          |
| <b>3b. Provide rigorous evidence-based instruction</b>  |   |  |  |   |          |
| 3b1. The LEA has set high academic standards and ensures access to rigorous standards-based curricula.  | Standards and assessments have been adopted.  | And curriculum and instruction are aligned with standards to support rigorous learning.  | And guidance on using a variety of instructional modes to meet the student needs based on formative assessment data is provided.           | And instructional meetings are conducted to review instructional practices and gather feedback to better use the guidance and sample lessons. |          |
| 3b2. The LEA assists schools in selecting and implementing evidence-based programs and interventions with fidelity to address student needs and eliminate those that are not. | School improvement plans are reviewed at the LEA level for compliance related to evidence-based programs and interventions. | And timely feedback is provided to schools to the selection of evidence-based programs and interventions in school improvement plans.                | And support and resources on effectively using fidelity checks of selected programs and interventions are provided.                        | And includes assisting schools in evaluating the implementation and effectiveness of programs and interventions.                              |          |

| Element  | Consistently Low Performance   | Basic Performance  | Moderate Performance   | Consistently High Performance   | Evidence |
|--|--|--|--|---|----------|
| 3b3. As gaps are identified in the curriculum or instructional delivery, the LEA develops plans to strengthen curriculum and instructional delivery.   | A process to review curriculum and instructional delivery to identify gaps is in place.  | And includes creating and implementing actions to address the gaps.  | And includes assisting schools in identifying gaps in the use of the curriculum or instructional delivery in daily teaching.   | And includes building school capacity to regularly monitor and make adjustments to actions to address gaps are completed.   |          |
| <b>3c. Remove barriers and provide opportunities</b>   |  |  |  |   |          |
| 3c1. Systematically identify barriers to student learning and opportunities to enhance learning for students who demonstrate early mastery.  | Policies and practices are reviewed to identify artificial and non-academic barriers to student learning and enhanced learning opportunities.          | And actions to remove barriers to student learning and opportunities to enhance learning opportunities within its control are implemented.   | And partnerships with other organizations, including businesses, are established to increase enhanced learning opportunities for students who demonstrate early mastery. | And supports are provided to schools on creating and utilizing the partnerships to provide enhanced learning opportunities for students who demonstrate early mastery.                      |          |
| 3c2. Partner with community-based organizations, such as health and wellness organizations, youth organizations, and other service providers, to support students in overcoming obstacles and developing the personal competencies that propel success in school and life. | Obstacles to students developing personal competencies that propel success in school and life are identified in collaboration with identified schools. | And community-based organizations, such as health and wellness organizations, youth organizations, and other service providers are identified to support students in overcoming obstacles. | And partnerships with the identified community-based organizations are established.  | And support is provided to schools for creating and utilizing the partnerships to support students in overcoming obstacles and developing and developing personal competencies for success. |          |
| <b>Strengths and Weaknesses in Instructional Transformation</b>  |  |  |  |   |          |
|  |  |  |  |   |          |

### 3. CULTURE SHIFT

| Element   | Consistently Low Performance  | Basic Performance   | Moderate Performance  | Consistently High Performance  | Evidence |
|---|---|---|---|--|----------|
| <b>4a. Build strong community intensely focused on student learning</b>   |   |   |   |  |          |
| 4a1. Ongoing conversations between LEA and school personnel and families are candid, supportive, and flow in both directions.   | Avenues for two-way communication between LEA and school personnel and families are in place.   | And include ongoing communication between LEA, school personnel and families.   | Such communication is specific, candid and supportive of identified schools, their students, and their families.  | And information from the two-way communication is used to further strengthen LEA, school, and family relationships.  |          |
| 4a2. The LEA provides opportunities and avenues for sharing school improvement progress and successes with students, family, teachers, and leaders, starting with quick wins early in the turnaround process. Early successes promote an expectation for further success and engender confidence in the competence of colleagues. | A communication plan is in place to gather and share school improvement progress and successes with internal and external stakeholders. | And includes structures and routines for collaborative reflection on school improvement progress and successes.           | And is used to routinely communicate school improvement progress and successes with internal and external stakeholders.   | And utilizes lessons learned from successes to encourage and support school improvement work to increase success.  |          |
| 4a3. Create opportunities for members of the school and LEA community to come together to discuss, explore, and reflect on student learning.  | Opportunities for LEA community members to come together to discuss, explore, and reflect on student learning are available.            | And information from discussions and reflections are used to increase community engagement in school improvement efforts. | And is used to provide support to schools in creating local opportunities for school community members to come together to discuss, explore, and reflect on student learning. | And includes supports to schools on utilizing information from discussions and reflections to increase community engagement in their school improvement efforts. |          |



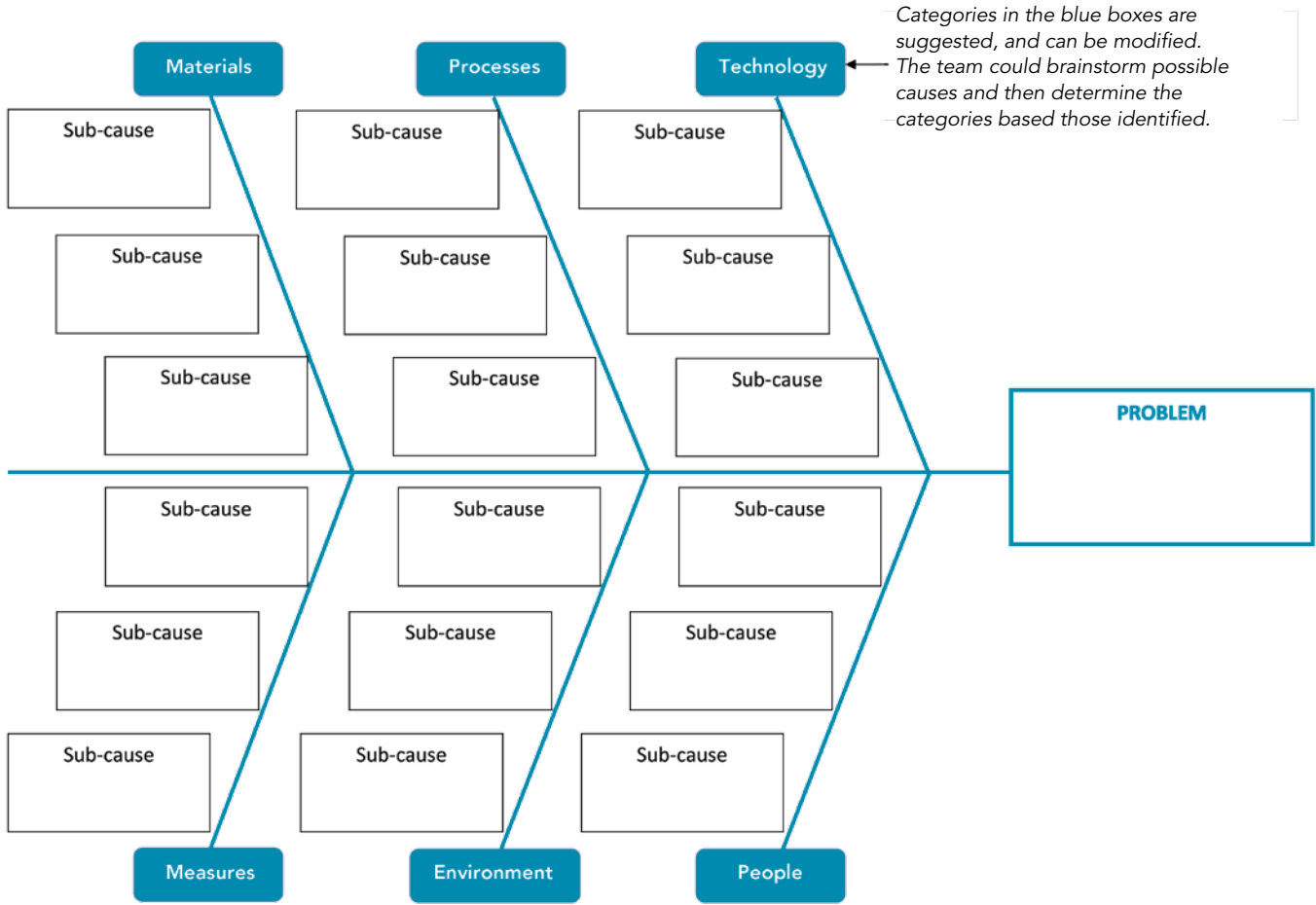
| Element  | Consistently Low Performance   | Basic Performance  | Moderate Performance  | Consistently High Performance   | Evidence |
|--|--|--|---|---|----------|
| <b>4b. Solicit and act upon stakeholder input</b>  |  |  |   |   |          |
| 4b1. Collective perceptions about the degree to which school climate is or is not positive is gathered and used to gauge climate-related work by LEAs and schools striving for improvement.        | A process to gather feedback on school improvement efforts is established.                                 | And includes a diagnostic instrument to gather feedback early on in the improvement process from stakeholders.                     | And includes the use of periodic surveys to follow-up on perception of school improvement efforts.  | And includes professional learning to school leaders on assessing stakeholder perceptions and acting on what they have learned.                           |          |
| 4b2. Stakeholder perceptions are considered when identifying priorities and improving the underlying conditions that contribute to school climate issues.  | A process to summarize stakeholder perceptions for use in decision making is established.                  | And includes using summary information to improve the underlying conditions that contribute to both LEA and school climate issues. | And includes assistance schools in using the information to determine priorities to improve the underlying conditions that contribute to school climate issues. | And includes resources to identify and implement evidence-based approaches to improve the underlying conditions that contribute to school climate issues. |          |
| 4b3. Acknowledge and respond to constructive feedback, suggestions, and criticism.   | Constructive feedback, suggestions, and criticism are gathered by stakeholder input.                       | And are used to improve school improvement efforts.  | And is used to assist schools in documenting and responding to feedback, suggestions and criticism.   | And includes collaborating with schools to implement improvement actions based on the feedback, suggestions and criticism.                                |          |
| <b>4c. Engage students and families in pursuing educational goals</b>  |  |  |   |   |          |
| 4c1. Intentionally build students' personal competencies to pursue goals, persist on tasks, appraise progress, hone learning strategies, and direct their learning to enhance capacity to succeed. | The importance of building student personal competency skills is reflected in the LEA's overall direction. | And is communicated to internal and external stakeholders.   | And policies and practices are reviewed and revised to support schools in building students' personal competencies.   | And professional learning and resources are provided to schools to build students' personal competencies.   |          |

Utilizing Integrated Resources to Implement the School and District Improvement Cycle and Supports

| Element  | Consistently Low Performance   | Basic Performance   | Moderate Performance   | Consistently High Performance  | Evidence |
|--|--|---|--|--|----------|
| 4c2. Provide students with opportunities to connect their learning in school with their interests and aspirations. | Instructional guidance documents include examples of how teachers can help students connect learning with their interests and aspirations. | And includes resources to community-based learning opportunities for students to connect their learning with their interests and aspirations. | And support is provided to schools in utilizing the instructional guidance to increase student learning with their individual interests and aspirations. | And assists schools in monitoring the use and results of student learning in community-based learning opportunities to improve and expand opportunities. |          |
| 4c3. Meaningfully engage parents in their child's learning, progress, interests, and longterm goals.               | A parent guide on how to engage in their child's learning, progress, interests, and longterm goals is available.                           | And includes resources assessments, interest inventories, and career and college information.   | And professional learning is provided to schools on the use of the parent guide and resources to increase parent engagement in their child's learning.   | And includes support to collect and use data to inform effective practices to improve family engagement.   |          |
| <b>Strengths and Weaknesses in Culture</b>   |  |   |  |  |          |

Additional elements that might be useful to include in an LEA self-assessment include local school board effectiveness or the use of external vendors. For more information on sample indicators for these elements, please see the Council for Chief State School Officers' and the Center on School Turnaround's *Using Needs Assessments for School and District Improvement: A Tactical Guide*

# TOOL D: FISHBONE TEMPLATE FOR ROOT CAUSE ANALYSIS





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