

# Colorado's Four Domains of Rapid School Improvement



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Denver, CO 80203



**COLORADO**  
Department of Education

Colorado's Framework is an adaptation from The Center on School Turnaround. (2017). Four domains for rapid school improvement: A systems framework [The Center for School Turnaround at WestEd]. San Francisco, CA: WestEd.

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# INTRODUCTION

The Colorado’s Four Domains of Rapid School Improvement framework was adapted from the Center on School Turnaround’s (CST) Four Domains of Rapid School Improvement. The domains and practices identified in the framework apply across the system of the state education agency (SEA), the local education agency (LEA), and the school. For each practice, the roles of the state, the district, and the school are briefly outlined, providing examples of their reciprocal roles in successful school improvement efforts. The domains are not meant to be considered in isolation, or to be approached in a step-by-step manner. The domains and practices overlap, with some consistent threads woven throughout, including the need for clear goals and expectations, for tailored support, for stakeholder engagement, and for accountability to encourage a positive environment that is focused on improving student outcomes in the lowest performing schools. Further, the practices are not provided in a suggested order of implementation. An improvement plan should consider the most appropriate prioritization of the implementation of evidence-based practices. Ideally, many practices will be implemented simultaneously, but it would be difficult and even counterproductive to focus on too many areas or practices at once.

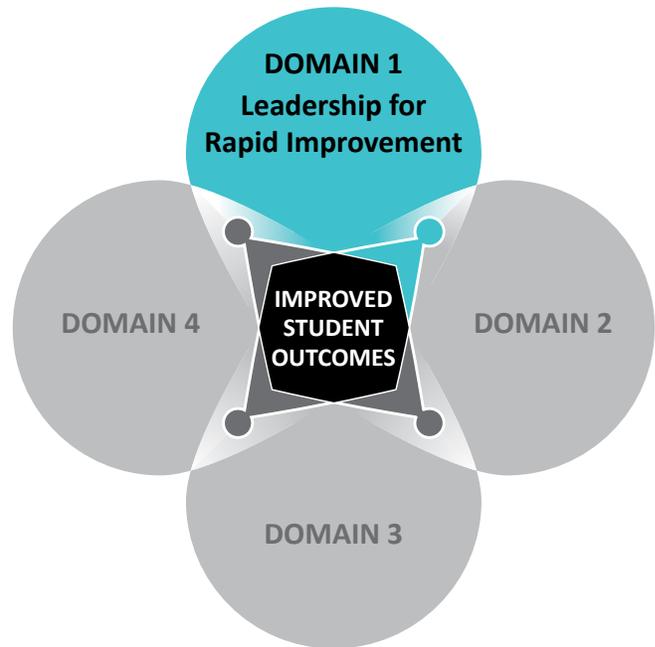
Rapid improvement has proven to be hard work; it is not a linear process with defined steps that guarantee positive results. This framework should not be considered a “magic bullet,” but rather a construct to successfully lead systemic efforts to achieve rapid school improvement. Context and consistency matter in terms of fidelity of implementation and impact. This framework organizes the issues that state, district, and school leaders should consider when planning for successful and sustainable improvement. Decisions about what practices to implement when, and how, as well as necessary course adjustments, should consider the particular needs and context of a rapid improvement effort. The framework reflects the multifaceted and interrelated aspects of rapid improvement as currently understood by research.

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## DOMAIN 1:

# Leadership for Rapid Improvement

**Domain Descriptor:** Educational leaders at the state, district, and school levels drive initiatives to facilitate rapid, significant, and sustainable improvement for low performing schools. Because the state education agency, districts, and schools function collectively as a system, leaders’ initiatives at any one level of the system affect other levels.<sup>1</sup> At all levels in the system, leaders make it a priority to elevate the performance of schools in improvement, and they communicate the urgent need for rapid improvement so that all students receive the high-quality education they deserve.<sup>2</sup> The policies, structures, resources, and personnel that leaders put into place to rapidly and significantly improve schools reflect the leaders’ strong commitment to this work.<sup>3</sup> Leaders catalyze and organize the coordinated work of the staff and other strategic partners charged with implementing efforts to rapidly improve schools, harnessing their efforts and drawing them to a shared vision of success.<sup>4</sup> Leaders at all levels understand their role in ensuring rapid improvement; they develop and execute data-informed improvement plans that are customized to local needs to guide and monitor urgent, prioritized initiatives; and they accept responsibility for results.<sup>5</sup>



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<sup>1</sup> Kowal, Hassel, & Hassel, 2009; Player, Hitt, & Robinson, 2014; Zavadsky, 2013

<sup>2</sup> Leithwood, Harris, & Hopkins, 2008

<sup>3</sup> Day, 2009; Hitt, 2015; Meyers & Hitt, 2017

<sup>4</sup> Brady, 2003; Lane, Unger, & Souvanna, 2014

<sup>5</sup> Strunk, Marsh, Bush-Mecenas, & Duque, 2015

## PRACTICE 1A:

# Prioritize Improvement and Communicate its Urgency

### Practice Descriptions:

- Set the strategic direction for rapid improvement, and establish and communicate clear policies, structures, and expectations for constituents to work toward ambitious improvement goals.<sup>6</sup>
- As part of that strategic direction, set a clear vision for instruction and behavioral expectations reflected in classrooms, schools' instructional models, and professional learning.
- Articulate a commitment to accelerate improvement for the lowest-performing schools and advocate fiercely and effectively across stakeholders for these schools.<sup>7</sup>
- Closely monitor, discuss, report, and act upon the progress of schools undertaking rapid improvement.<sup>8</sup>

### Examples of How Different Levels of the System Can Enact this Practice

**State.** Establish an office or core cadre of personnel responsible for supporting policy, programmatic implementation, and evaluation efforts to lead school improvement initiatives. State leaders advocate the social and moral imperative of school improvement through multiple public forums, leveraging communication and other strategies to garner parent and community support.

**District.** Identify a senior district official to lead a team that oversees local rapid improvement initiatives, including overseeing principal support and development, policy development, districtwide data analysis, and overall strategy direction. The superintendent articulates the need for rapid improvement, connecting the state's championing of efforts to local contexts and inviting local community members to further inform implementation efforts, policy, and resource distribution.

**School.** Develop leadership teams and, within the school staff, build leadership capacity for rapid school improvement. Increasingly distribute leadership among faculty and staff to solidify commitment, increase collaboration, and provide faculty and staff with new challenges to keep them meaningfully engaged in rapid school improvement efforts. Share school improvement priorities with students, faculty, and the school community, leveraging local media outlets to communicate the school's commitment to change and to enlist parent and community partners in the effort.

<sup>6</sup> Lane et al., 2014; Murphy, 2010; Player & Katz, 2016; Stringfield, Reynolds, & Schaffer, 2008

<sup>7</sup> Herman, Dawson, Dee, Greene, Maynard, Redding, & Darwin, 2008; Rhim & Redding, 2014

<sup>8</sup> Matthews & Sammons, 2004; Player, Kight, & Robinson, 2014

## PRACTICE 1B:

# Monitor Short- and Long-Term Goals

### Practice Descriptions:

- Develop goals informed by recent data and performance trends, and identify practices under a well-articulated, documented, and communicated plan for significantly improving equitable student learning outcomes.<sup>9</sup>
- Establish data-based milestones for gauging progress. Regularly communicate progress and continually update timelines and tasks to maintain the pace needed to accomplish meaningful goals quickly.<sup>10</sup>
- Respond to regular data-based feedback on progress toward goal-directed milestones, and make timely adjustments to policy, programs, and personnel to remain on track to achieve desired results for all students.<sup>11</sup>
- Celebrate initial successes and capitalize on momentum to shift the focus from understanding change to implementing effective organizational processes, structures, and conditions that contribute to sustainable improvement.<sup>12</sup>

### Examples of How Different Levels of the System Can Enact this Practice

**State.** Create overarching expectations and accountability for improved student outcomes that are clearly articulated and measurable and that can be adapted for local contexts. Share clear examples of high impact practices deployed at high-performing schools, along with aspirational examples of schools that have made rapid improvement.

**District.** Provide intensive, tiered support to principals and school leadership teams to help them develop action items, timelines, and responsibilities aligned with their school's improvement plan. Provide access to data and training to inform and develop goal-directed milestones, including markers for implementation, changes in professional practice, interim and annual student assessments, and evaluation efforts. Provide schools with resources, time, and concrete feedback to support them in refining and advancing their improvement plan.

**School.** Develop and update the school improvement plan to ensure that it has clear short- and long-term goals. Celebrate initial successes, monitor the progress of strategy implementation, and make changes in personnel, programs, and methods as needed to keep the effort on track. Intervene swiftly if waning progress is detected.

<sup>9</sup> Duke, 2015; Knudson, Shambaugh, & O'Day, 2011

<sup>10</sup> Hanushek & Raymond, 2004; Strunk et al., 2015

<sup>11</sup> Johnson & Asera, 1999; Player et al., 2014

<sup>12</sup> Herman et al., 2008; Public Impact, 2007

## PRACTICE 1C:

# Customize and Target Support to Meet Needs

### Practice Descriptions:

- Provide customized, targeted, and timely support for improvement efforts based on root cause analysis, existing capacity, and identified prioritized needs.<sup>13</sup>
- Align support to ensure coherence and integration with other necessary initiatives; eliminate unnecessary initiatives.<sup>14</sup>
- Regularly monitor progress to identify support needs and then act quickly and competently to address those needs.<sup>15</sup>

### Examples of How Different Levels of the System Can Enact this Practice

**State.** Conduct site visits to monitor plan implementation, and target district support based on identified priorities and progress toward articulated goals. As an incentive to drive change, allow earned autonomy for local leaders in making key decisions. Share templates and tools to enable local leaders to make the best decisions for supporting school improvement plans and actions. Provide professional learning activities for district and school leaders to establish and strengthen organizational leadership.

**District.** Provide tailored support to each school based on deep root-cause analysis and comprehensive needs assessment to inform the school's improvement priorities. Customize each school's level of autonomy for personnel hiring, placement and replacement, and other key decisions based on school capacity.

**School.** Identify the priority needs of the school, focusing on two to three immediate priorities. Request flexibility from established policies and/or procedures as justified by the data, school improvement plan, and school capacity.

<sup>13</sup> Baroody, 2011; Player et al., 2014; Salmonowicz, 2009

<sup>14</sup> Newmann, Smith, Allensworth, & Bryk, 2001; Zavadsky, 2013

<sup>15</sup> Herman et al., 2008; Hochbein, 2012; O'Day, 2002

## FRAMEWORK SELF-REFLECTION:

### Domain 1: Leadership for Rapid Improvement

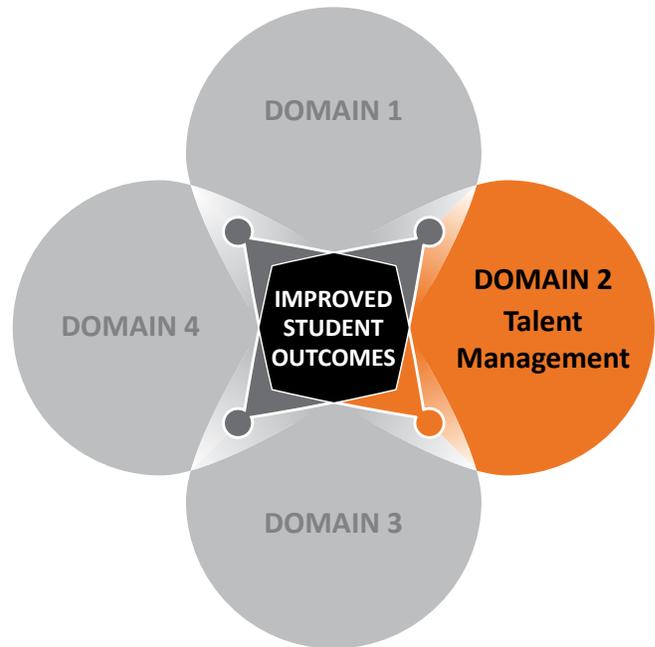
- What are your school improvement goals?
- How do you define success regarding meeting school improvement goals?
- What structure(s) or processes are in place to assess whether your efforts are successful?
- Who will be held accountable for creating timelines and updating the team regarding continuous progress?
- How will your progress on data-referenced goals be monitored, tracked, and communicated?
- What measures will be monitored and evaluated to identify successes and challenges in student outcomes for school improvement?
- Who will be held accountable at each level to monitor and report changes in student outcomes?
- Who will determine what interim assessments will be administered and analyzed?
- Who will be held accountable for analyzing and reporting the results of the interim assessments?
- How will the results of the interim assessments be reported to everyone involved?
- What tools, systems, and structures need to be established in order to give school rapid improvement leaders adequate decision-making authority and autonomy?
- How will you publicly advocate for your lowest-performing schools and your rapid improvement process?
- What steps need to be established for this advocacy process and who will be held accountable?
- What is your plan for engaging parents and other community stakeholders in your rapid improvement process?
- How do you define flexibility and how will you offer it to your rapid improvement leadership?
- What tools, systems, and structures are needed in order to provide flexibility to turnaround leadership?
- How will data be used to customize support for rapid improvement efforts?
- How will you consider the sustainability of improvement efforts from the start?

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## DOMAIN 2:

# Talent Management

**Domain Descriptor:** Rapid improvement requires competent and committed personnel at every level and in every position.<sup>16</sup> Policies and procedures reflect an urgency and commitment to identify, select, place, retain, and sustain these personnel, especially teachers. Service providers, school-level leaders and teachers are a precursor to school improvement.<sup>17</sup> Staffing of these positions should be approached through an equity (i.e., the equal access and distribution of high quality personnel) lens.<sup>18</sup> Turnaround competencies are identified and used to select and develop effective teachers, model teachers, and leaders.<sup>19</sup> At all levels, educators utilize and hone their instructional and transformational leadership to build capacity in those they supervise by continually balancing support with accountability.<sup>20</sup>



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<sup>16</sup> Berry, 2004; Crowther et al., 2009; Darling-Hammond et al., 2007

<sup>17</sup> Boyle et al., 2014; Trujillo & Renee, 2013

<sup>18</sup> Boyle et al., 2014; Trujillo & Renee, 2013

<sup>19</sup> Steiner & Barrett, 2012; Steiner & Hassel, 2011

<sup>20</sup> Grissom et al., 2013; Hallinger, 2003; Murphy, 2008; Orr et al., 2008; Yatsko et al., 2015

## PRACTICE 2A:

# Recruit, Develop, Retain, and Sustain Talent

### Practice Descriptions:

- Plan proactively for recruiting and developing talent with turnaround-specific competencies to quickly fill vacancies.<sup>21</sup>
- Use multiple sources of data to match candidate skills and competencies to school needs, prioritizing the highest need schools.<sup>22</sup>
- Provide induction, mentoring, and accelerated supports to new or struggling teachers.
- Implement recruitment and retention policies that include succession planning activities by creating in-house district preparation programs designed to foster and generate rapid improvement competencies to develop, support and sustain future improvement leaders and teachers.<sup>23</sup>

### Examples of How Different Levels of the System Can Enact this Practice

**State.** Develop and disseminate human resource practices designed to identify, extend, and support turnaround competencies in leaders and teachers and train districts in the use of these practices. Offer preparation programs that focus on rapid improvement to support the development of aspiring school leaders.

**District.** Create a model for selection and placement of teachers and school leaders with turnaround competencies, ensuring that schools in improvement status have preferential access to teaching candidates. Challenge and support human resources staff to design programs that identify and support the development of potential rapid improvement leaders and teachers. Develop multiple measures and data sources (e.g., observation of candidates over time in various settings) to closely analyze an individual's readiness and potential as a leader of school improvement.

**School.** Collaborate with the district to develop a school-specific competency model for teachers leading school improvement to discern which competencies should be prioritized in the teacher-selection process at this school. Utilize the district talent pool as the "go-to" source for hiring assistant principals and teachers. Identify and encourage aspiring leaders to participate in preparation programs that emphasize rapid school improvement.

<sup>21</sup> Berry, 2004; Crowther et al., 2009; Darling-Hammond et al., 2007; Guarino et al., 2006; Steiner & Barrett, 2012

<sup>22</sup> Berry, 2004; Crowther et al., 2009; Steiner & Barrett, 2012; Steiner & Hassel, 2011

<sup>23</sup> Berry, 2004; Darling-Hammond et al., 2007; Epstein et al., 2016; Parsley & Barton, 2015

## PRACTICE 2B:

# Target Professional Learning Opportunities

### Practice Descriptions:

- Offer and evaluate high-quality, culturally appropriate, responsive professional learning opportunities using evidence-based adult learning principles, designed to build the capacity needed for rapid and sustainable school improvement.<sup>24</sup>
- Plan and deliver regular opportunities for job-embedded learning that includes coaching, mentoring, and observation (including peer observations).<sup>25</sup>
- Leverage and maximize the effectiveness of high-performing teachers, coaches, and leaders by using them as models and peer coaches.<sup>26</sup>

### Examples of How Different Levels of the System Can Enact this Practice

**State.** Provide training to districts on how to develop, implement and evaluate a teacher professional learning model with individualization, cultural responsiveness, and job-embedded processes as the focus. Provide funding preference to professional learning opportunities that reflect these processes. Share examples of how districts and schools have implemented peer coaching, mentoring, and peer observation. Model a willingness to learn and grow through constant reflection and refinement of supports. Ensure that development opportunities offered to districts model the formats and principles of effective professional learning.

**District.** Create timelines and other accountability systems that remind principals to regularly examine teacher performance and to rapidly adjust professional learning plans based on identified needs. Provide district staff with job-embedded professional learning and opportunities to learn side by side with school leaders. Ensure that district-offered professional learning experiences are differentiated, purposeful, targeted, implemented with fidelity, and reflective of what is known about successful adult learning and the rapid improvement endeavor.

**School.** Create a cadre of instructional leaders (drawing from assistant principals, department coordinators, team leaders, and teachers with demonstrated instructional effectiveness and mentoring or coaching capacity) who each respond to the professional learning needs of a manageable portion of the faculty and use data to identify those needs. Provide opportunities for leaders and teachers to learn side by side and share how their own ongoing growth impacts their individual practice as instructional and organizational leaders. Ensure that learning experiences are evidence-based, differentiated, purposeful, targeted, culturally responsive, employed in rapid response to identified needs, reflective of what is known about effective adult learning and clearly connected to the school's improvement priorities.

<sup>24</sup> Borko, 2004; Guskey, 1999; Huffman, 2003; Thompson et al., 2016

<sup>25</sup> Aubuchon, 2013; Borko, 2004; Grissom et al., 2013; Huffman, 2003; Little, 1993

<sup>26</sup> Darling-Hammond, 1999; Klem & Connell, 2004; Stronge et al., 2007; Wayne & Youngs, 2003

## PRACTICE 2C:

# Set Clear Performance Expectations

### Practice Descriptions:

- Develop clear roles, responsibilities and competencies for every position and articulate alignment of accountability leading to rapid improvement.
- Communicate high expectations for a level of professional performance for every role in the system.<sup>27</sup>
- Develop and implement performance-management processes that include clear means for monitoring progress and delivering meaningful and actionable feedback, flexibility to rapidly respond to professional learning needs, and opportunities to revise milestones as needed.<sup>28</sup>

### Examples of How Different Levels of the System Can Enact this Practice

**State.** Develop protocols to assist districts in analyzing role expectations and adapting those expectations to support rapid school improvement. Provide support and tools to help districts establish accountability and monitor milestones.

**District.** Identify which district-level roles will contribute to school rapid improvement efforts; review and refine job expectations and descriptions to reflect realistic and high-leverage responsibilities to support rapid improvement.

**School.** Define expectations for teachers, clearly and realistically considering how to effectively leverage teacher time and effort. Develop a daily and weekly schedule that reflects this priority of effective use of teacher time. When asking more of a teacher, consider removing another responsibility.

<sup>27</sup> Anderson et al., 2014; Lynne Lane et al., 2013

<sup>28</sup> Regan et al., 2015; Lynne Lane et al., 2013

## FRAMEWORK SELF-REFLECTION:

### Domain 2: Turnaround Management

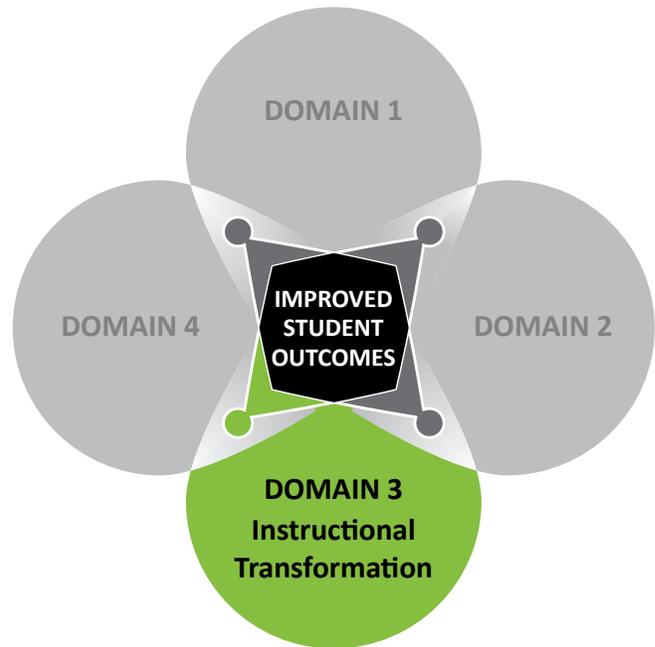
- Do you use turnaround competencies for the identification of teachers for low-performing schools? If so, what are the turnaround competencies for teachers in your context?
- Do you use turnaround competencies for the identification of principals for low-performing schools? If so, what are the turnaround competencies for leaders in your context?
- If you do not use competencies, how will you identify the skills and aptitudes needed for rapid improvement leaders and/or teachers? What resources are available?
- What tools, systems, and structures need to be established for leaders to maintain a balance of support with accountability at all levels? Do the tools, systems, and structures need to vary depending on the level (state, district, or school)?
- How will you develop a teacher and leader pipeline? What tools, systems, and structures need to be established to make this pipeline sustainable?
- Who will be responsible for identifying the hiring needs of schools in improvement?
- How will you create consensus and understanding of teacher placements and assignments? What will you use to match school needs with teacher and leader competencies?
- What are the professional learning needs of rapid improvement leadership and staff? What steps need to be accomplished to fulfill those needs?
- How will high-performing teachers be leveraged to expand their positive influence outside of just their own classrooms?
- Who will be responsible for providing, leading, and evaluating the impact of professional learning opportunities and experiences for rapid improvement leadership and staff? How can you ensure that professional learning will be rapid, responsive, effective, and customized?
- Who will be held accountable for setting clear performance expectations for staff? How will they determine those expectations? How will staff be assessed or held accountable for achieving those performance expectations?

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## DOMAIN 3:

# Instruction Transformation

**Domain Descriptor:** Improving and sustaining equitable student learning outcomes depends on system-wide support for change in classroom instruction.<sup>29</sup> Effective instructional practice, including strong standards-based, instruction,<sup>30</sup> data-based planning,<sup>31</sup> differentiation and individualization,<sup>32</sup> culturally relevant, evidence-based pedagogical approaches,<sup>33</sup> and classroom management,<sup>34</sup> must be identified, delivered and supported at the school, district, and broader system level. Schools cultivate and maintain an environment of both high expectations and support for all students' academic and behavioral achievement.<sup>36</sup> Leaders prioritize their time to focus on instructional transformation with a specific emphasis on prioritized student populations and meeting their unique learning needs. While districts and schools strive to focus their organization's attention on the in-school factors impacting student performance, they also attempt to address factors that are traditionally non-school based so that all students come to the task of learning, ready for the challenge, and with a sense of safety and belonging.<sup>36</sup>



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<sup>29</sup> Herman et al., 2008; Masumoto & Brown-Welty, 2009

<sup>30</sup> Browder et al., 2006; Drake, 2007

<sup>31</sup> Anderson et al., 2010; Hamilton et al., 2009; Love et al., 2008

<sup>32</sup> Browder et al., 2006

<sup>33</sup> Reigeluth, 2013

<sup>34</sup> Allen et al., 2013; Weinstein et al., 2004

<sup>35</sup> Adelman, 2006; Masumoto & Brown-Welty, 2009; Moore & Emig, 2014

<sup>36</sup> Walsh et al., 2014

## PRACTICE 3A:

# Diagnose and Respond to Student Learning Needs

### Practice Descriptions:

- Diagnose student learning needs to drive all instructional decisions and evaluate their effectiveness in meeting the needs of prioritized students.<sup>37</sup>
- Based on identified needs, incorporate effective student supports and instructional or behavioral interventions.<sup>38</sup>
- Use fluid, rapid assessment and adjustment of instructional grouping and delivery to meet all student learning needs.<sup>39</sup>

### Examples of How Different Levels of the System Can Enact this Practice

**State.** Provide incentives around funding and support to LEAs and schools that target staffing improvements that ensure teachers have the time and capacity to diagnose and respond to each student’s needs. Provide training on fluid instructional groupings and selecting evidence-based strategies that address local needs.

**District.** Develop protocols to assist teachers in drilling down on individual student academic and/or behavioral needs and creating action plans aligned to those needs. Explore creative use of instructional time, which may include but is not limited to, options for extended learning such as longer school days, weeks, or summer sessions to support each student’s needs. In doing so, any additional instructional time should be structured and staffed to ensure high-quality learning will occur (continuing effective evidence-based practices). Ensure that data sources (e.g., benchmark assessments) exist for teachers to conduct frequent progress monitoring of student outcomes.

**School.** Regularly examine individual student data, carried out in team meetings, professional learning communities (PLCs), or in other planning sessions as part of teachers’ regular work and expectations. Creatively use fluid instructional groupings rather than year-long assignments that may not meet students’ (and teachers’) needs. For example, when students struggle with a certain concept, they could be assigned temporarily to a teacher whose data demonstrate that he or she teaches it well or differently from the students’ current teacher(s), placed in a small group for reteaching, or given individualized instruction. Provide teachers time within the school day to conduct such analysis and develop plans to address identified needs. Hold teachers accountable for doing so and for carrying out the plans they develop for students.

<sup>37</sup> Anderson et al., 2010; Lachat & Smith, 2006

<sup>38</sup> Hamilton et al., 2009; Lachat & Smith, 2006; Love et al., 2008; Tomlinson et al., 2003; McIntoch & Goodman, 2016

<sup>39</sup> Hamilton et al., 2009; Klute et al., 2016; Love et al., 2008

## PRACTICE 3B:

# Provide Rigorous Evidence-Based Instruction and Behavioral Supports

### Practice Descriptions:

- Implement high academic standards and behavioral expectations for all students and ensure access to rigorous standards-based curricula that is implemented with fidelity.<sup>40</sup>
- Provide ongoing coaching and progress monitoring to ensure evidence-based strategies are used in instructional planning and facilitation of student learning.<sup>41</sup>
- As gaps are identified in the curriculum or instructional delivery, develop plans to strengthen these key components.<sup>42</sup>

### Examples of How Different Levels of the System Can Enact this Practice

**State.** Provide district-level leaders with professional learning on state standards that enables them, in turn, to plan and provide learning opportunities that bolster teacher content knowledge to improve instructional delivery when needed. Provide guidance on using evidence to select curricular, behavioral, and instructional supports.

**District.** Work with schools' instructional leadership teams to refresh, update, and bolster teachers' content knowledge through ongoing professional learning opportunities on rigorous evidence-based instruction. Coordinate vertical alignment such that teachers understand what their students should have learned the prior year, before entering their classroom, and what their students will be expected to learn the following year. Examine curricular, behavioral, and instructional supports to ensure they are grounded in evidence, rigor, and the state standards.

**School.** Conduct a curriculum analysis and map lesson plans against standards to ensure the plans adequately represent the standards. Determine whether adjustments and supports are needed to ensure all students have equitable access to the curricula. In each instructional mode utilized — whether whole class, small group, independent work, technology-based, or homework — ensure that teachers routinely utilize the best instructional practices for that mode and that school leaders support their development of those practices.

<sup>40</sup> Browder et al., 2006; Drake, 2007; Herman et al., 2008

<sup>41</sup> Andrews & Goodson, 1980; Gustafson & Branch, 1997; Reigeluth, 2013

<sup>42</sup> Drake, 2007; Herman et al., 2008

## PRACTICE 3C:

# Remove Barriers and Provide Opportunities

### Practice Descriptions:

- Systematically identify and eliminate barriers to equitable access to student learning and participation in elective courses and extra-curricular opportunities.<sup>43</sup>
- Enhance learning by providing relevant opportunities for exploration and expand options to prepare for college, career, military, and other life skills pathways.
- Provide multiple opportunities for all students by engaging with families and other strategic partners to support all students in overcoming obstacles and developing personal competencies that propel success in school and life.<sup>44</sup>

### Examples of How Different Levels of the System Can Enact this Practice

**State.** Support districts in developing early warning systems to identify students who may be falling behind, giving the school an opportunity for timely intervention. Identify and network with other state-level entities that could serve as partners for schools and districts. Create access to services that districts can deploy in order to meet students' needs that, if left unaddressed, can impede learning (e.g., health care, clothing, nutrition).

**District.** Identify and remove any barriers (whether policies or practices) that stand in the way of all students having an equitable opportunity to learn at higher levels and participate in extracurricular activities. Identify the district's most prevalent non-academic barriers to student learning. Disseminate this information to principals, and during meetings with principal supervisors to continually revisit how community resources can be leveraged creatively to meet students' basic needs.

**School.** Track student progress and help students regain lost ground through academic supports (e.g., tutoring, co-curricular activities, tiered interventions), extended learning opportunities (e.g., summer bridge programs, after-school and supplemental educational services, Saturday academies, enrichment programs), credit-recovery programs, and virtual courses. Give students demonstrating sufficient prior mastery access to higher-level assignments and courses. Network with nearby organizations in the community to identify available supports — or to generate new supports — for students. Consider having medical, dental, and social-emotional services available on-site on a regular basis. Provide on-site laundry service for families in need. Provide food for students during extended learning sessions and other periods when they are at school outside of regular school hours.

<sup>43</sup> Cantor et al., 2010

<sup>44</sup> Blank et al., 2009; Brownell & Walther-Thomas, 2001; Vita, 2001; Masumoto & Brown-Welty, 2009; Moore & Emig, 2014

## FRAMEWORK SELF-REFLECTION:

### Domain 3: Instructional Transformation

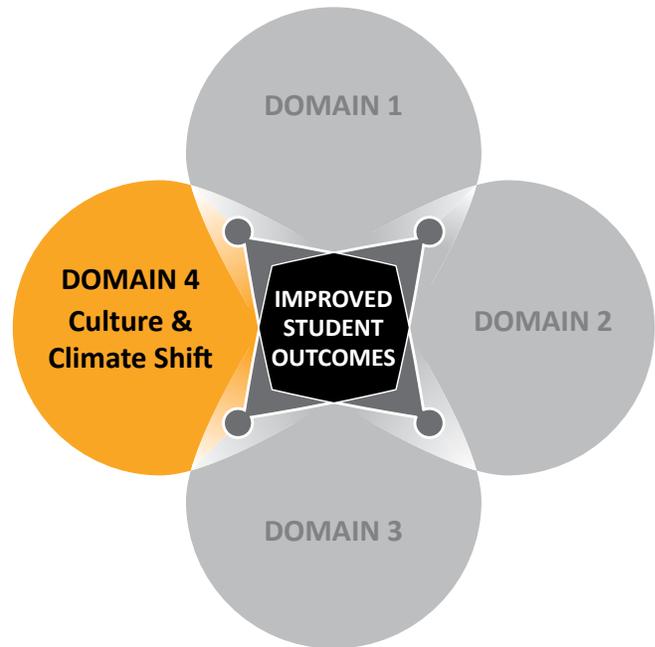
- How will teachers diagnose each individual student’s learning needs? What tools, systems, and structures need to be established?
- How can fluid grouping of students be implemented and supported?
- How will alignment of instruction with standards be facilitated?
- Identify possible barriers to student learning and how each level of the system can work to remove those academic and non-academic barriers in schools in improvement.
- How will teachers guide and track the progress of each student? What tools, systems, and structures need to be established?
- Who will establish these tools, systems, and structures?
- What learning benchmarks will teachers use in order to guide and track the progress of students?
- What types of early warning systems will identify students who may be falling behind? Who will be held accountable for establishing those early warning systems?
- What evidence-based interventions are used to help students who are falling behind? How might those be adjusted or changed? Who will be included in the team to adjust or change those interventions?
- How can funds be leveraged by your schools to provide additional academic and behavioral supports, extended learning opportunities, credit recovery programs, and virtual courses? Are there stakeholders who would be willing to financially support these programs?
- How do teachers challenge students that are exceeding their current level of schooling? What types of programs does your schools offer?
- What types of higher-level assessments and courses have your schools offered in the past and have they worked well to challenge gifted or advanced students? What can schools do differently to challenge gifted or advanced students?
- How do teachers give students authentic experiences, to connect their interests with real-world applications?
- How do your schools involve community members and stakeholders in offering internships, career exploration, and service-learning opportunities? Who will be held accountable for helping make these connections for your students?

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## DOMAIN 4:

# Culture and Climate Shift

**Domain Descriptor:** Successful rapid improvement and sustained focus depends on district and school partnering to achieve extraordinary results.<sup>45</sup> Attaining the necessary level of commitment to achieve these equitable results requires a dramatic culture shift towards both high academic and behavioral expectations and concerted effort.<sup>46</sup> A rapid improvement culture fuses strong community cohesion and high expectations with quality student and family supports; one without the other is insufficient.<sup>47</sup> Leadership establishes and communicates the structure and opportunities for stakeholders to work together around common goals, engendering a culture of mutual respect, shared leadership, and focused attention on student and adult learning.<sup>48</sup> State, district, and school leaders understand and engage families and community partners to support their children’s learning and the overall improvement efforts.<sup>49</sup> A strong school community attends to the culture both inside and outside the school,<sup>50</sup> gathering input from stakeholders and gauging perceptions about the school and the rapid improvement effort.<sup>51</sup> All students and staff are challenged and supported to hold high expectations for culture to achieve expectations and equitable outcomes for all students.<sup>52</sup> A positive school climate reflects a supportive and fulfilling environment, high expectations and teaching and learning conditions that meet the needs of all students and their families, individuals confident in their roles and responsibilities in student learning, and a culture that values trust, respect, and high expectations.<sup>53</sup>



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<sup>45</sup> Lambert, 2002; Louis, Leithwood, Wahlstrom, Anderson, Michlin, & Mascall, 2010; Saunders, Goldenberg, & Gallimore, 2009

<sup>46</sup> Herman, Dawson, Dee, Greene, Maynard, Redding, & Darwin, 2008; Masumoto & Brown-Welty, 2009

<sup>47</sup> Epstein, 2001; Mapp & Kuttner, 2013; McAlister, 2013

<sup>48</sup> Herman et al., 2008; Masumoto & Brown-Welty, 2009

<sup>49</sup> Epstein & Sanders, 2000; McAlister, 2013

<sup>50</sup> Bryk & Schneider, 2002; Louis, 2007

<sup>51</sup> Brazer & Keller, 2006; Redding, Murphy, & Sheley, 2011

<sup>52</sup> Herman et al., 2008

<sup>53</sup> Cohen, McCabe, Michelli, & Pickeral, 2009; Gottfredson, Gottfredson, Payne, & Gottfredson, 2005

## PRACTICE 4A:

# Build a Strong Community Intensely Focused on Student Academic Achievement and Behavioral Outcomes

### Practice Descriptions:

- Celebrate successes collaboratively – starting with quick wins early in the rapid improvement process – of students, families, teachers, and leaders. Early success promotes an expectation for further success.<sup>54</sup>
- Provide explicit expectations about responsibilities, behaviors, and available supports for each role in improving systems and student performance.<sup>55</sup>
- Model high expectations (of self and others), embed them in everyday practice and language, and reinforce them through shared accountability.<sup>56</sup>
- Ensure the mission and vision are clearly communicated to all stakeholders and drive the work of improvement efforts in the school (exemplified in beliefs and behaviors).<sup>57</sup>

### Examples of How Different Levels of the System Can Enact this Practice

**State.** Provide districts with tools for tracking, analyzing, and sharing data on school performance, professional practice, perception data, and student opportunities. Share findings and exemplary practices across districts, set policies that require a demanding curriculum, positive behavior supports, and shared accountability for equitable outcomes for all students.

**District.** Provide systems and structures to support collaborative district and schoolwork such as dedicated time for reflection and collaboration. Align personnel evaluations with the role expectations for rapid improvement. Offer opportunities and avenues for sharing school improvement progress and successes.

**School.** Establish systems (i.e., structures, policies, procedures, and routines) for focused collaborative work; recognize student effort, positive behavior supports, and academic mastery; recognize job satisfaction and camaraderie among staff as essential assets in a rapid improvement effort. Maintain a positive, encouraging classroom and school culture for students where students feel safe and supported to share their needs, struggles, and concerns. Recognize each incremental improvement but keep the focus on ultimate results at the student, teacher, and school levels. Celebrate team accomplishments and offer recognition for hard work and improvement. Frequently and openly review and discuss with stakeholders data on school improvement progress (including implementation, leading indicators and evaluation results).

<sup>54</sup> Herman et al., 2008; Kowal, Hassel, & Hassel, 2009

<sup>55</sup> Leithwood, Harris, & Strauss, 2010; Saunders, Goldenberg, & Gallimore, 2009

<sup>56</sup> Lambert, 2002; Masumoto & Brown-Welty, 2009

<sup>57</sup> Aquino, Desravines, Fenton, 2016

## PRACTICE 4B:

# Solicit and Act Upon Stakeholder Input

### Practice Descriptions:

- Regularly gather, disaggregate, and analyze collective perceptions held by school personnel, students, families, and the broader community about school climate and its relationship to improvement efforts as well as decision making at all levels.<sup>58</sup>
- Utilize multiple methods to communicate and solicit feedback and data from all stakeholders, including historically under-served populations, to discuss, explore, and reflect on student learning.<sup>59</sup>
- Acknowledge and respond to constructive feedback, suggestions, and criticism in a way that is timely, consistent and predictable.<sup>60</sup>

### Examples of How Different Levels of the System Can Enact this Practice

**State.** Provide instruments and protocols for conducting and evaluating inclusive local perception surveys, forums, and focus groups to districts and schools. Provide opportunities for parents and community members to provide feedback at state and local levels.

**District.** Administer a diagnostic instrument soliciting feedback from school personnel, families, students, and community members early in the school improvement process with periodic follow-up surveys to assess perceptions of the school and the improvement efforts. Provide training for school leaders on assessing stakeholder perceptions and acting on what they learn.

**School.** Learn what constituents perceive by conducting surveys, forums, focus groups, and suggestion boxes. Share and act on what is learned. Take constituent input into account when making programmatic decisions and share the impact and inclusion of such input on decisions made. Consistently demonstrate that all voices are heard.

<sup>58</sup> Redding et al., 2011; San Antonio & Gamage, 2007

<sup>59</sup> Brazer & Keller, 2006; McAlister, 2013

<sup>60</sup> Thapa, Cohen, Guffy, & Higgens-D'Alesandro, 2013; Smith, & Wohlstetter, 2001

## PRACTICE 4C:

# Engage All Students and Families in Pursuing Educational Goals in a Meaningful Way

### Practice Descriptions:

- Intentionally build all students' personal competencies to pursue goals, persist with tasks, appraise and be accountable for their progress, hone learning strategies, and direct their own learning to further enhance their capacity to learn and succeed.<sup>61</sup>
- Provide all students with equitable opportunities to connect their learning in school with their strengths, interests, aspirations, and post-secondary goals.<sup>62</sup>
- Partner with families using relevant two-way communication to engage meaningfully in their child's learning, progress, interests, well-being and long-term goals and to maintain consistent support for all students.<sup>63</sup>

### Examples of How Different Levels of the System Can Enact this Practice

**State.** Require evidence of direct linkage between family and community engagement and student outcomes in improvement plans and reports. Provide training and resources on family and community engagement. Provide professional learning on student goal setting, self-regulation of learning, and family engagement in the student's progress.

**District.** Provide resources for sharing assessments, interest inventories, and career and college information with all students and families. Provide planning templates for students to plan coursework and college and career pathways. Provide line items in the school budget for resources related to family engagement for the specific purpose of supporting student learning, include information about the school's data-supported progress with family engagement in monthly board reports. Set aside time and provide structures for parent and community groups focused on improved student learning.

**School.** Programmatically and systematically build all students' skills in setting learning goals, managing their learning, and pursuing their goals by charting progress on coursework and towards their postsecondary goals. Inform and engage families in planning and supporting their students' education goals. Provide students and their families with a full explanation of assessment results and interest inventories to help them make the best decisions. Access community resources and expertise to expand students' understanding of potential careers and education options.

<sup>61</sup> Kaplan & Midgley, 1997; Redding, 2014

<sup>62</sup> Bryk, Sebring, Allensworth, Luppescu, & Easton, 2010; Masumoto & Brown-Welty, 2009

<sup>63</sup> Epstein, 2001; Epstein & Sanders, 2000; Mapp & Kuttner, 2013; McAlister, 2013; Sanders, 2001

## FRAMEWORK SELF-REFLECTION:

### Domain 4: Culture and Climate Shift

- How will your work with your rapid improvement school leaders and teachers acknowledge and include their ideas in creating a culture that values effort, respect, behavioral outcomes and academic achievement?
- How will you invite students, parents and community members to engage in meaningful dialog? How will you include their ideas in your process for creating a culture that values effort, respect, and academic achievement?
- How will you include members of the community in your rapid improvement efforts? How will you encourage them to participate in the improvement process?
- How will you communicate the progress of your rapid improvement? Who will be held accountable for this communication at each level? How will the path be made clear to everyone?
- How will you solicit and act upon input from stakeholders regarding their perceptions about your schools? What tools need to be created in order to solicit that input? Who will be held accountable in developing and distributing those tools?
- What will you need to do to adjust perceptions about your schools in improvement, if negative, from your stakeholders? How will you show them your turnaround school progress?
- How will you share assessment results in a meaningful and relevant manner with your families? What will need to be in place to ensure that all families have access to this information? How will you assist families in educational planning?

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## CONCLUSION

Grounded in rapid improvement and improvement research, and drawing from The Center on School Turnaround’s work, this framework offers a set of practices, with related examples, in each of the four domains, or areas of focus, that, together, describe a systemic approach to rapid, significant, and sustainable school improvement. The goal is to promote the use and routinization of effective practices, so they become part of the culture at all levels of the endeavor to dramatically improve low-performing schools.

To the extent that educators at the state, district and school level are able to implement these practices in a contextualized fashion, a state’s education ecosystem is strengthened, with the system bolstering, rather than hindering, school improvement efforts. In this increasingly supportive ecosystem, dramatic improvement is no longer manifested in “islands of excellence.” Instead, these routinized practices positively affect low performing schools are replicated across the board, making excellence the norm rather than the exception. Through these practices, systemic improvement becomes “the way we do business” at the state, district, and school levels.

The framework is not intended to provide an exhaustive list of activities within each practice or even of all practices. Instead, it offers examples, considerations, and practical applications of what it takes to successfully lead systemic efforts to achieve rapid school improvement. It is important to emphasize that none of the four domains identified in the framework — leadership for rapid improvement, talent management, instructional transformation, and culture and climate shift — should be considered in isolation. The domains outlined in the framework are designed to focus practices and policies that improve the quality of teaching and learning, improve and develop competent rapid improvement leadership, and engage schools’ communities, students, teachers, parents, and other stakeholders in the implementation of strategic improvement efforts. As such, each domain and its practices are an integral part of rapid improvement efforts, building on and from the others. Taken together, the domains provide a comprehensive view of the work needed for rapid improvement. Ultimately, systemic improvement efforts require a dramatic transformation in how the state, district, and school attend to each domain and implement its critical practices with the aim of achieving successful and sustainable rapid improvement.

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