Department of Education
Carmen Fariña, Chancellor

Vision for School Improvement: Applying the *Framework for Great Schools*

Step 3: Engage in Cycles of Learning

Activity: As a Community, Reflect and Prepare for Cycles of Learning (60 minutes)

Overview

Through a series of sequenced reflection questions, this activity guides teams through the four stages of a cycle of learning. This activity can be done in small or large groups across a team.

Objective

Through reflection and discussion, participants will prepare to engage in cycles of learning and explore the ways they connect to the work of the entire team.

Materials

- Step 3 Guiding Questions (below)
- Graphic organizer (below)

Connected Activities

While this activity can be conducted on its own, its content also connects with the following activities available on the Vision for School Improvement website:

- Exploring the *Framework for Great Schools*
- Exploring a Vision for School Improvement: Applying the *Framework for Great Schools*
- Exploring Learning to Improve: the Research behind the Vision for School Improvement
- Guiding Questions for Step 1: Looking at Current Practice Toward a Shared Understanding of the *Framework for Great Schools*
- Guiding Questions for Step 2: Assessing Needs and Establishing Goals through the Lens of the *Framework for Great Schools*

Guiding Questions

- What will cycles of learning look like in my team?
- How can my teamuse learning to drive continuous improvement?

Facilitation Notes

1. **Introduction and framing (5 minutes)**
   - Welcome participants and review the objective and guiding questions of the activity.

- Explain that participants will work to connect the cycles of learning to their school community context and deepen their understanding of the process and its stages by:
    - Discussing guiding questions related to the stages of cycles of learning.
    - Reflecting on the process as a whole and connecting its stages to their school's work.
- Remind participants that since this is a preview of a cycle, some of the questions will ask them to think through the implications of work that they have not yet completed. For instance, for the parts of the cycle that rely on evidence, this activity will require participants to base their discussion on hypothetical data. In these cases, they should use their own experience in their school to predict what the data might show, and talk through the implications of such findings. Encourage them to use more than one hypothetical data result, so that they are dealing with data that both supports and challenges their initial change idea.

Note to facilitator:
In order to make this overview as authentic as possible, participants will need to start with a problem statement. This problem may be one that their team has already chosen to target through their cycles of learning, or, if that decision hasn't been made yet, it can be any problem that prevents the school from meeting its goals. It is important that the problem selected is something that the participants know well.

A problem statement should be:
- Built from input from multiple stakeholders
- Described from the user-perspective (usually the student, but sometimes the educator)
- Within the school community's locus of control

2. **Part A: Walkthrough of a cycle (25 minutes)**

Plan

- Ask participants to independently read through the description of the Plan stage of the cycle (page 5 in A Vision for School Improvement: Applying the *Framework for Great Schools*), and then discuss these guiding questions in groups. Invite participants to take notes on their graphic organizers.
    - What is a specific problem that we will address in the coming year? How is it currently impacting student growth and achievement?
    - How does the *Framework* expand our understanding of this problem and its root causes? Do the individual elements and the interplay among them help identify additional root causes?
    - What approaches could be used to address the root causes of this problem? Which of the root causes should we prioritize?
    - Which of these approaches could be most impactful given the time and resources available?
    - What, specifically, will change if this trial is a success? What parts of the process will we measure to see if the approach is working?
- Note: For further guidance on developing change ideas and measuring and monitoring their impact, see the High Leverage Change activity and Practical Measurement Guidance.

Implement

- Ask participants to independently read the description of the Implement phase of the cycle (page 5 in A Vision for School Improvement: Applying the *Framework for Great Schools*), and then discuss the following guiding questions in groups.
    - What are all the ways in which this change is expected to create improvement? Which of these are most important?
    - What evidence would let us know how the change is working?
    - Does this evidence fully capture the impact of the change? Does it provide insight into the process as well as the final outcomes?
    - What existing data can be used, and what other data will be needed? What is the most practical way to collect it?

Reflect and Adjust

- Ask participants to independently read the description of the Reflect and Adjust stage of the cycle (page 5 in A Vision for School Improvement: Applying the *Framework for Great Schools*), and then discuss the following guiding questions in groups. Remind them that they will be making assumptions about data that doesn't yet exist, and that they should think about how they would answer each question in the face of plausible hypothetical evidence. Ask them to respond to the following questions based on two sets of hypothetical findings: one that confirms their initial predictions and another that proves them wrong.
    - What does our evidence tell us about our progress towards our goal?
    - Did our change have the predicted impact on student learning (or a process that you have agreed is a critical condition for improving student learning)?
    - For whom and under what circumstances did the change have the biggest impact? For whom and under what circumstances did the change have the smallest impact?
    - What questions does this variation in the impact raise? What does the variation reveal?
    - How does the evidence advance our understanding of the problem and its root causes? Does the *Framework* help us make sense of the evidence?
    - Based on what we have learned, what adjustments might strengthen our progress towards our goal? How will we put these adjustments into action?

Share Results

- Ask participants to independently read the description of the Share Results stage of the cycle (page 5 in A Vision for School Improvement: Applying the *Framework for Great Schools*), and then discuss the following guiding questions in groups. Remind them that they should make this as meaningful as possible by using their past experiences in lieu of the data that a real cycle would provide.
    - What progress towards our goals has our school community achieved together? What have we learned from our successes?
    - What have we learned from our struggles? What lessons can we take from our wrong predictions?
    - What worked for all students and/or classes, and what only worked for some? How can we explain this variation? What can it teach us?
    - After consolidating and analyzing all the data, what have we learned as a school community about the problem?
    - What could other schools and colleagues learn from our process? How could we collaborate with our peers to share our successes and learn from theirs?
    - How can our learnings foster new ideas and impact the practice of peers both at our school and across the system?

3. **Part B: Reflection on the cycle (10 minutes)**
    - As a whole group, debrief the experience using the following reflection questions.
        - Looking back on this preview of a cycle of learning, what about it felt natural? In what ways was it similar to work you have done before?
        - What about this cycle was new or challenging?
        - How are the different parts of the cycle interconnected? How are some parts dependent on the others?
        - What are some of the difficulties your school community may face in engaging in cycles of learning? How might you prepare to deal with them?

4. **Identifying next steps and available resources (5 minutes)**
    - Ask participants to identify and share one lesson they will apply to the cycles of learning they will undertake in the coming school year (in pairs or in the whole group).

- Remind participants of the supporting resources and activities available on the Vision for School Improvement website:
    - Exploring a Vision for School Improvement: Applying the *Framework for Great Schools*
    - Research Brief on the research behind A Vision for School Improvement
    - Case studies and snapshots of current practice in NYC schools

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Graphic Organizer for Activity: As a Community, Reflect and Prepare for Cycles of Learning

Plan

- Starting with your school's identified goals, collaboratively define a specific problem you will aim to solve, investigate root causes, and select a strategy to try to improve a key component of that root cause. Use the *Framework* to consider the factors that may contribute to the problem.
- Establish indicators of success, including process indicators and student outcomes. What, specifically, will change if this trial is a success?

- What is a specific problem that we will address in the coming year? How is it currently impacting student growth and achievement?

- How does the Framework expand our understanding of this problem and its root causes? Do the individual elements and the interplay among them help identify additional root causes?

- What approaches could be used to address the root causes of this problem? Which of the root causes should we prioritize?

- Which of these approaches could be most impactful given the time and resources available?

- What, specifically, will change if this trial is a success? What parts of the process will we measure to see if the approach is working?

Implement

- Try the strategy you identified.
- Collect evidence aligned to the established indicators of success to inform adjustments at the end of the cycle. Did the strategy improve student learning or a process that you have agreed is a critical condition for improving student learning?

- What are all the ways in which this change is expected to create improvement? Which of these are most important?

- What evidence would let us know how the change is working?

- Does this evidence fully capture the impact of the change? Does it provide insight into the process as well as the final outcomes?

- What existing data can be used, and what other data will be needed? What are the most practical ways to collect it?

Reflect and Adjust

- In collaborative groups, reflect on progress towards your goals, learn from successes and failures, adjust plans, and then try a new or adjusted strategy.
- Use the *Framework* as a lens to help formatively assessing progress, not only for individual elements, but also for the interplay among elements.

- What does our evidence tell us about our progress towards our goal?

- Did our change have the predicted impact on student learning (or a process that you have agreed is a critical condition for improving student learning)?

- For whom and under what circumstances did the change have the biggest impact? For whom and under what circumstances did the change have the smallest impact?

- What questions does this variation in the impact raise? What does the variation reveal?

- How does the evidence advance our understanding of the problem and its root causes? Does the framework help us make sense of the evidence?

- Based on what we have learned, what adjustments might strengthen our progress towards our goal? How will we put these adjustments into action?

Share successes

- As a school community ensure you record your successes and failures in order to continuously learn. When we compare results to predicted outcomes, we gain insight about the factors at play. Wrong predictions are as valuable as correct ones. This guidance is not a new accountability measure; it is a plan for learning.
- When strategies you try have the intended impact on your success indicators, take time to consider how you will share this knowledge with other teams both within and outside your school. Expect support organizations to share successful approaches from around the City.
- It is also important to ensure that you communicate your challenges with this work to your support organizations so they can support you.

- What progress towards our goals has our school community achieved together? What have we learned from our successes?

- What have we learned from our struggles? What lessons can we take from our wrong predictions?

- What worked for all students and/or classes, and what only worked for some? How can we explain this variation? What can it teach us?

Share successes (continued from previous page)

- After consolidating and analyzing all the data, what have we learned as a school community about the problem

- What could other schools and colleagues learn from our process? How could we collaborate with our peers to share our successes and learn from theirs?

- How can our learnings foster new ideas and impact the practice of our peers both at our school and across the system?

Reflection Questions:

- Looking back on this preview of a cycle of learning, what about it felt natural? In what ways was it similar to work you have done before?

- What about this cycle was new or challenging?

- How are the different parts of the cycle interconnected? How are some parts dependent on the others?

- What are some of the difficulties your school community may face in engaging in cycles of learning? How might you prepare to deal with them?