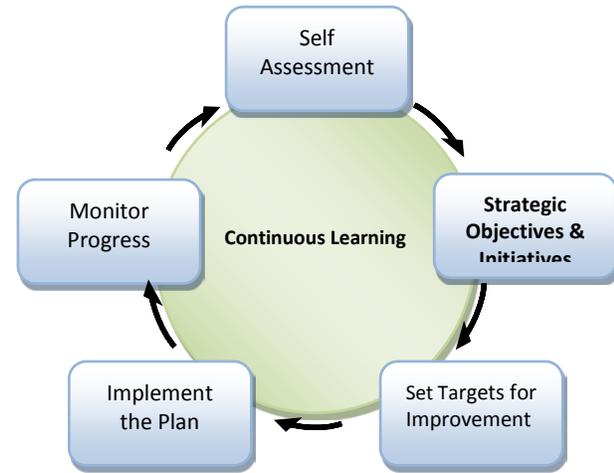


District Accelerated Improvement Planning
Guiding Principles for Effective Benchmarks

What are Benchmarks?

Once a Plan is developed, its implementation must be monitored and reflected on regularly in order to determine if progress is being made, and if mid-course corrections are necessary. The foundation of this process is the articulation of effective benchmarks that are agreed upon in advance by key stakeholders involved in the work. These predetermined “proof points” of progress provide targets for improvement that become opportunities to celebrate accomplishments and/or to reflect on how practice can be improved.

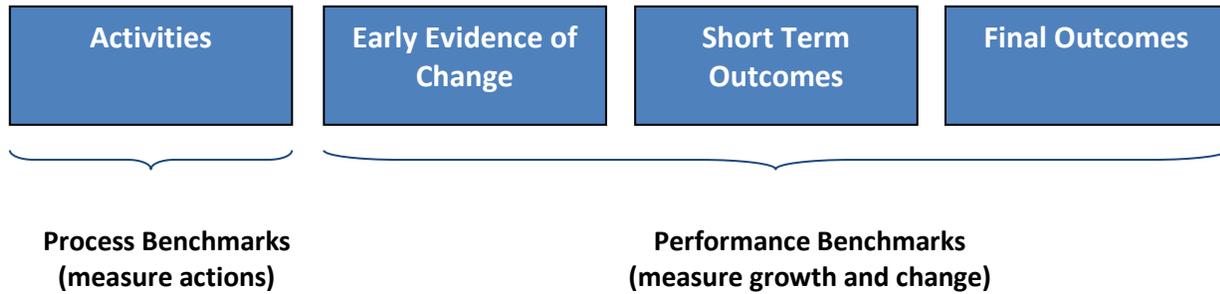


The Accelerated Improvement Planning process has four types of benchmarks:

Benchmark	Description	Helps answer the question...	Frequency
Activities	Steps to be taken to implement the strategic initiative: <i>who will do what by when?</i>	<i>How will we know if we're doing what we said we would do?</i>	<i>Daily, weekly, monthly</i>
Early Evidence of Change	Indicators of effective implementation of the Activities. Capture <i>changes in actions, discourse, beliefs, expectations, and instructional practice</i> . State clearly how the indicator will be measured.	<i>What will we see if what we are doing is beginning to make a difference? And how will we know it is making a difference?</i>	<i>Monthly, quarterly</i>
Short Term Outcomes	Changes in results that are expected to predict Final Outcomes. State clearly how the outcome will be measured.	<i>How will we know we have been successful in the short term?</i>	<i>Monthly, quarterly</i>
Final Outcomes	Annual targets for student outcomes.	<i>How will we know we have been successful in the long term?</i>	<i>Annual</i>

Clearly articulated benchmarks can help communicate expectations to educators and students involved in the work, and makes it easier to gain agreement about whether or not progress is being made. Ideally, the evidence for each benchmark will be generated by the regular work of educators. If the benchmark requires a new form of evidence that has not previously been collected, it should be clear how the addition of that evidence reinforces the type of changes the district is seeking in skills, practices, mindsets, and discourse.

Types of Benchmarks



Activities outline the key actions the district will take to implement the initiatives in order to reach the final outcomes. Activities articulate *who will do what, by when*. For this reason, Activities demonstrate that the *process* used to implement the plan is effective. The activities should reflect critical milestones and not the minutiae of the district’s daily work. All Activities with a long timeframe (Sept – June) should include information regarding how and when the district will monitor progress in the interim. For ongoing Activities, specify the frequency (e.g., weekly; monthly). For time bound projects, indicate what the discrete components are and when they will be completed.

Grade level teams of classroom teachers meet weekly to analyze student data and plan instructional changes to core instruction as part of the data inquiry cycle.

Administrators provide feedback to each teacher monthly based on administrative observations and review of lesson plans.

Convene an Administrative Leadership Team that meets weekly with all curriculum directors, ELL, SPED, and student services directors to share information and identify areas where collaboration is needed to implement the AIP.

By October 1, 2012, each school will develop School Improvement Plans (SIPs) that are focused on instructional improvement and are aligned to the district Accelerated Improvement Plan (AIP).

By November 1st, inventory current academic interventions and documents outlining policies and services for students and families.

For the start of SY12-13, redesign High School’s Guidance Department to have a Student Success Team (2 guidance counselors, 1 attendance specialist, 1 SpEd facilitator, 1 graduation facilitator and 1 crisis counselor) in order to enhance supportive services to students identified as at-risk for dropping out of school.

By January 2013, develop a plan for a bridge program for “at-risk” eighth grade students as they transition to gr. 9 and obtain approval for program and budget needs in order to begin implementation for the 2013-2014 school year.

More important than monitoring *process*, a district will want to know if these activities are amounting to any meaningful change and improvement in the *performance* of educators and students. The following three types of *performance benchmarks* specify targets for different types of change the district expects to see.

Early evidence of change benchmarks outline *changes in actions, discourse, beliefs, expectations, and instructional practice* that suggest the action steps are adding up to meaningful new ways of serving students in the district, not just business as usual. Early Evidence of Change may be the most important benchmarks for providing clarity about how particular adult actions matter for improving teaching and learning. They can also be the hardest to articulate. It is these changes in practice that will result in the subsequent improvement in short-term and final outcomes. **We cannot just will our way to improved outcomes; we have to actually change what we are doing on a daily basis** as we engage in teaching and learning. Early Evidence of Change focuses primarily on adult practice, either at the classroom or administrative level, but can capture shifts in student behavior as well.

Early Evidence can be identified for any time of the year, but is most effective when it is measured a short time after the implementation of the relevant Activity. For example, if professional development takes place in January, you might look for changes in practice beginning in February, continuing to measure the same practice over time to show improvement.

By November, 60 percent of staff will use sheltered instruction techniques in each class on a daily basis, measured through lesson plans, learning walks and unannounced classroom visits. January target = 80 percent; May = 90 percent.

35% of classrooms are at least "Providing" in Indicator 4: Student Ownership of Learning (Students ask, "What do I do when I haven't learned it yet, or already know it?") by January, and 50% by May based on documented District Learning Walks

Each month, all principals improve in the quality of their feedback to teachers regarding differentiated instructional strategies, standards-based lesson plans and curriculum maps as evidenced by monthly ratings on the district developed rubric .

By October 2013, every K-2 teacher will be able to use the new district-wide academic-intervention identification protocol to report baseline data on the percentage of students at each instructional tier, as evidenced by teacher-generated classroom reports collected by the principal and reported to the Assistant Superintendent on Form A, Percentage of students at each school on Tier I, II, and III.

By January 2013, every school will be able to report on the interventions provided to each student with chronic attendance issues, as evidenced by monthly written principal reports to the Assistant Superintendent on Form B, "Interventions for students with chronic attendance issues."

Short-term outcomes provide districts concrete targets for improved outcomes that can serve as indicators that they are on track toward their final annual outcomes, ideally predicting performance on MCAS and other final outcome measures. For example, while improving MCAS scores may be an important final goal, a district will need periodic indicators to know if it is on track to help students get to proficiency and beyond. While short-term goals most often reflect student learning targets, they can also reflect adult outcomes as well.

Benchmark data shows increased student performance of 10 percentage points over baseline upon each administration in Math and ELA at all grade levels (Fall-to-Winter; Winter-to-Spring).

80% of students demonstrate improvement on interim assessments through each 6 week cycle /DRA/Common unit assessments.

High performing schools (95%+ attendance rate for Gr. K-8, 92%+ for Gr. 9-12) will maintain their attendance rate monthly, and lower performing schools will show monthly improvement to reach target attendance by June.

Quarterly progress reports analysing walkthrough data by principals and directors show at least a 30 percentage point increase each quarter in the effective implementation of the district's instructional expectations.

Final Outcomes define the student achievement gains the district plans to accomplish that year, given the Initiatives and Activities that are instituted. Final Outcomes include, at minimum, the district's Progress and Performance Index (PPI) targets outlined by ESE for aggregate and high needs students. If the strategic initiatives outlined in the AIP impact specific schools, grades, or subgroups, the AIP should include final outcomes specific to those populations. A district may opt to include additional student outcome measures above and beyond those included in the PPI targets either to present a fuller picture of progress, or to show the impact of initiatives that do not directly influence the PPI targets. For example, district-determined assessments, student attendance, promotion and/or discipline data, to name a few.

Examples of PPI targets:

The district will demonstrate a 10-point improvement in Student Growth Percentile (SGP) from the prior year.

The district will demonstrate a 2.5 point improvement on Composite Performance Index (CPI) throughout grades 3-5.

Examples of non-PPI targets:

The number of students scoring proficient on a district-wide writing sample will increase from <X> in spring of 2012 to <Y> in the spring of 2013.

Each school will decrease their percentage of chronically absent students to 10% or less.

The percentage of seniors attending college will increase 5% by July 2013.

Criteria for an Effective Benchmark

Each of the four types of benchmarks should adhere to the following criteria:

1. **Helps a district monitor effective implementation of its Plan** by answering the following questions:
 - a. *How will we know if we're doing what we said we would do? (Activities)*
 - b. *What will we see if what we are doing is beginning to make a difference? (Early Evidence of Change)*
 - c. *How will we know we have been successful in the short term?*
 - d. *How will we know we have been successful in the long term?*

2. **Leaves little room for interpretation.** All stakeholders should be able to read a given benchmark and have the same understanding of what the target is, when it is expected to be reached, and how we will know if it has been reached.

3. **Outlines targets and evidence that are meaningful.** It is important for the benchmarks to capture the aspects of the district's improvement work that will most likely lead to meaningful conversation and problem-solving and that will suggest progress. Consider what comprises the best type of evidence for the identified benchmark. Would all stakeholders agree this is the most effective and efficient means for representing meaningful work in the district? For example, measuring attendance at a professional development session might motivate people to attend; however measuring the *application* of professional development helps educators reflect on and modify their practice.

4. **Outlines evidence that is reasonable to collect.** Benchmarks are more meaningful when they prompt the collection of evidence that adds value to, rather than negatively impacts, the district's improvement work. This can only be determined by considering the perspective of the person(s) collecting the evidence. If the time and effort needed to collect the evidence outweighs the value gained from reflecting on it, there is likely a better way.

5. **Are focused and aligned.** Together benchmarks should represent a whole that is greater than the sum of the parts, and should show that schools are on a trajectory for rapid improvement. Together, and over time, the benchmarks and related evidence should tell a clear, causal story about how transformation was accomplished. A strong Plan will have a few strategic benchmarks rather than an overwhelming list.

6. **Are SMART:** Specific and Strategic; Measurable; Action Oriented; Rigorous, Realistic and Results-focused; and Timed. Example:

It's Specific and Strategic	= 10 pounds, 1 mile
It's Measurable	= pounds, miles
It's Action-oriented	= lose, run
It's got the 3 R's	= weight loss and running distance
It's Timed	= 10 weeks

(For more information about SMART goals, see *What makes a Goal "SMARTer"?* handout and related guidance created for the Educator Evaluation Framework, available online at <http://www.doe.mass.edu/eval/>)

How do we go about creating effective benchmarks?

There is no right way to go about generating the benchmarks for your district. Here are some options:

Option 1: After outlining your Strategic Objectives and Initiatives, brainstorm the Activities needed to get those done. Then think about how you would know if those Activities worked, and brainstorm your Early Evidence of Change and Short-Term Outcomes.

Option 2: After outlining your Strategic Objectives and Initiatives, begin backward mapping – think about the evidence that would suggest you were close to reaching your Objectives and Initiatives – the Short-Term Outcomes and the Early Evidence of Change that would clearly demonstrate the intended impact of each distinct Initiative. Then continue backwards to identify the key Activities that will be necessary to reach those targets.

In terms of crafting the benchmarks themselves, it can be hard to ‘get it right’ the first time. Often benchmarks are strengthened in an iterative process as stakeholders engage with the evidence and reflect on whether it is helping the district show progress, or show where it is stuck.

To write a given benchmark, one approach is the following:

- First generate the basic idea – what will we see and/or experience that shows we are on the right track? Don’t worry about the specific measure, target, or timeline.
- Second, once you have brainstormed all of your benchmarks, go back and begin to refine them and make them SMARTer, focusing on **meaningful measures** and **precise targets**.
- Revisit a third time to ensure all benchmarks have **specific dates/timeframes** so all parties are clear when this benchmark can be measured.

The following examples show the evolution of some benchmarks for Early Evidence of Change:

ORIGINAL	FIRST REVISION	SECOND REVISION
<i>100% of teachers participate in SMART goal training</i>	<i>100% of teachers develop and use SMART goals aligned to SIPs as evidenced by... (more meaningful)</i>	<i>By Oct 15th, 100% of teachers develop and use SMART goals aligned to SIPs as evidenced by... (Specific timing)</i>
<i>K-2 teachers will use the academic intervention protocol...</i>	<i>Every K-2 teacher will be able to use the new district-wide academic-intervention identification protocol to report baseline data on the percentage of students at each instructional tier, as evidenced by teacher-generated classroom reports. (more measurable)</i>	<i>By October 2013, every K-2 teacher will be able to use the new ... protocol to report baseline data on the percentage of students at each instructional tier, as evidenced by teacher-generated classroom reports. (Specific timing)</i>
<i>Administrators will provide feedback on Indicator 2</i>	<i>60% of classrooms are at least “Providing” in Indicator 2 (more focused on teacher practice)</i> <i>Administrators will complete weekly classroom observations to collect data and provide feedback... (focuses on administrator practice)</i>	<i>By November, 60% of classrooms are at least “Providing” This will increase at least 5 points in each subsequent month.</i> <i>Each month, all principals improve in the quality of feedback to teachers, as measured by ratings on a district rubric ...</i> <i>(Specific timing for performance and measurable improvement)</i>