



# Focused Planning for Accelerating Student Learning

## District Guide for the Development and Implementation of Accelerated Improvement Plans

---

October 2013



## Introduction

This guide, created by the Department of Elementary and Secondary Education (ESE), provides support for Level 3 districts to accelerate achievement for all students through the development of a focused, actionable and sustainable Accelerated Improvement Plan (AIP).

The guidance is rooted in research and experience using a similar process with Level 4 districts. It has helped provide Level 4 districts with a structure for organizing and managing the complex changes needed to create the conditions for accelerated and sustained improvement in student performance. The theory of action concerning district improvement is that *if* a district can **define a narrow set of strategic objectives** to accelerate student learning, **execute well-defined initiatives** with a relentless focus on implementation, and **systematically monitor the impact of those initiatives** to inform mid-course corrections, *then* outcomes for students will be dramatically transformed.

### How to Use this Guide

This guide defines a voluntary process and provides tools and resources for improvement planning with a strong focus on measuring implementation and outcomes. The plan should be aligned with district needs and be realistic about the issues the district will face in bringing about accelerated improvement. While all districts may find this to be a useful process for planning, implementing, and monitoring improvement, this can be especially helpful in districts that must quickly and significantly increase student performance. Engaging in an AIP process is a particularly effective complement to a district review, providing a way to target and implement the recommendations made by the district review team.

Staff members from the District and School Assistance Center (DSAC) are available to support Level 3 districts with improvement planning through use of the tools, protocols and resources included in this guide, and to engage districts in an ongoing cycle of inquiry and improvement. For information on how to contact your regional DSAC, please visit <http://www.doe.mass.edu/apr/ssr/support/teams.html>.

Whether a district engages in the AIP process with the assistance of its regional DSAC or on its own, this guide is a comprehensive resource, filled with tools and tips gathered from the experiences of districts and ESE in developing and implementing Accelerated Improvement Plans. The guide maps a process for establishing benchmarks and action steps to rapidly create sustainable, organizational changes that improve outcomes for students. Rather than create additional work, the AIP process can serve as a framework for aligning other major district initiatives that will ultimately improve student outcomes, such as implementation of educator evaluation and effective data use. It also provides a structured opportunity to identify and celebrate accomplishments and improvement.

## Core Principles of Accelerated Improvement Planning

### **Core Principles of the Accelerated Improvement Planning Process**

The accelerated improvement planning process represents a new approach to supporting districts in transforming their work and dramatically increasing student learning outcomes. It is designed to add maximum value to districts while also meeting ESE's responsibility to provide increased accountability and assistance for underperforming school districts. There are several fundamental principles underlying this approach to accelerated improvement planning:

1. **Students cannot wait** for incremental improvement in their educational conditions.
2. The process must be **grounded in a cycle of continuous improvement**, informed by data, driven by results, and with a laser-like focus on implementation of a few high-leverage strategic objectives.
3. The process **requires time, attention, and commitment** and should be a central part of district leaders' daily work.
4. Monitoring of progress must **focus on outcomes** and how the activities outlined in the plan are serving the best interests of students.
5. **Collaboration** between and among stakeholders is essential for accelerated and sustained improvement.
6. The process requires a **willingness to challenge and be challenged**, to honestly assess progress and confront difficult issues, and to make the necessary mid-course corrections based on a robust analysis of evidence.
7. **Regular monitoring and accountability** is designed to focus and accelerate the improvement process by providing ongoing feedback.

### **Core Principles of the Accelerated Improvement Plan**

- A. The plan **targets and transforms instructional practices at all levels within the district** in a way that is tangible to all students, teachers, and families. All stakeholders should feel that something is different about how the district is approaching the business of educating students.
- B. The plan **focuses on outcomes**. The plan emphasizes *performance* more than *processes* to determine whether activities are improving teaching and learning, and making a difference for students. The activities in a plan are the means of achieving the strategic objectives and outcomes identified in the plan.
- C. **The sum is greater than the whole of the parts**. The activities, initiatives, and strategic objectives outlined in the plan should work together to strengthen and reinforce each other. Alignment and coherence of activities help maximize effort and resources, and focus the district on key priorities.
- D. The plan is **easily understood by all affected audiences**. The plan captures in plain language the critical issues that must be addressed in the district to bring about accelerated improvement: *what will be done and why*. The priorities for the district must be evident to parents, teachers and the community.
- E. The plan is a **useful tool to those who must implement it**. The plan is a living document, embedded in ongoing conversations about improvement, used and referenced daily by those responsible for its success.

**Fundamentally, an Accelerated Improvement Plan is a guide to getting important things done – quickly and sustainably.**

---

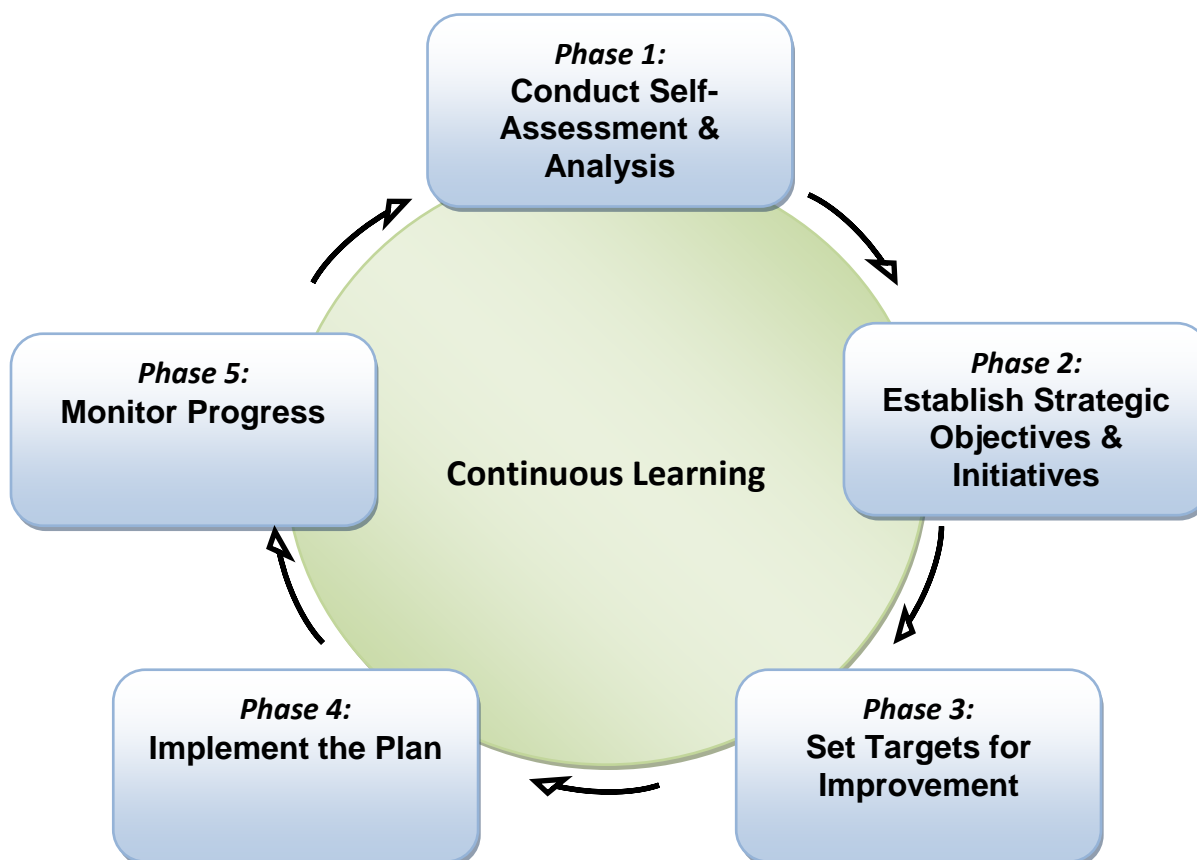
## **Phases of Accelerated Improvement Plan Development**

The recommended steps to be taken during the development and implementation of an AIP mirror the steps of a cycle of continuous improvement, demonstrating how the plan is a vital part of an ongoing process of reflection and refinement of educational practice. The phases include:

1. Phase 1: Conduct Self-assessment and Analysis
2. Phase 2: Establish Strategic Objectives and Initiatives
3. Phase 3: Set Targets for Improvement
4. Phase 4: Implement the Plan
5. Phase 5: Monitor Progress

While all phases are important and should be done carefully and completely, a district may enter the process at whatever point is most valuable. For example, if the district has already clearly identified key issues and challenges, it may choose to enter the process at the point where it wants to develop a set of strategic objectives and initiatives. This guide provides explanations, actions, and resources for each of the steps in the next thirteen pages. A template for the development of all sections of an AIP can be found in Appendix A. Sample Accelerated Improvement Plans, with examples of each component of the plan, can be found in Appendix B.

The following diagram depicts the five phases of the planning process.



## District and School Planning

A district may use this planning process and format as the core of its district-wide strategic or improvement plan, helping focus and align all district systems and resources to support the essential areas for improvement in the district. The AIP provides guidance to schools in the establishment of their priorities and depends on strong alignment among strategic objectives and initiatives at the district, school and classroom levels. For example, a district may choose to leverage the educator evaluation system and have educators develop a professional practice goal that aligns to one of the district's strategic objectives, and a student outcome goal that would directly contribute to the student outcome goals for individual schools and the district as a whole. Naturally, to accomplish this degree of alignment, the AIP needs to be completed within a time frame that provides the schools with sufficient time to then develop their improvement plans.

## Implementing the Five Phases of the Accelerated Improvement Plan

### **Phase 1: Conduct Self-assessment and Analysis**

***Identify key assets, issues and challenges, develop priority areas of need and explore root causes***

The first step in the planning process is to identify key issues and challenges faced within the district, as well as key assets that can be strengthened and leveraged to accelerate student learning. There are multiple avenues through which a district can gather this information. It can be drawn from district or school self-assessments, a district review, or other analyses of quantitative and/or qualitative data. The key issues should be aligned to ESE District Standards and Indicators (<http://www.doe.mass.edu/apa/general>).

After identifying the range of key assets, issues and challenges, the next step is to pinpoint those issues that, if targeted, have the greatest likelihood to directly impact the instructional core (i.e., the interaction of teachers and students and curriculum) and student achievement. In order to create a focused and actionable improvement plan, districts should target only a small number of high leverage areas for action (three to five). These areas should focus on the quality of educational services delivered, and their impact on student learning and achievement. It is critical to develop hypotheses concerning the root causes of the key issues and challenges. The analysis of what may be contributing to challenges within the district will help in the later development of strategic objectives and initiatives.

#### ***Phase 1 Tip: Assess Current Implementation Capacity***

In addition to conducting a self-assessment relative to the district's key issues and challenges, **assess operational capacity to deliver and implement improvement plans.**

Analyze the implementation and tracking of progress on past district plans to help identify any gaps in the implementation process, and analyze where breakdowns may have occurred in the past, in order to prevent similar challenges in the future. This is also an important opportunity to examine the roles and responsibilities of staff implementing the plan.

#### ***Resources:***

Appendix E: Delivery Chain Activity  
Chapters 1 and 2 in Barber, Moffit and Kihn, *Deliverology 101* (2011)

#### ***Phase 1 Tip: Identify and Gather Resources***

In preparation to begin Phase I, it may be helpful to **identify and gather district and school resources and information sources that will inform the self-assessment and analysis process.** These may include District Improvement Plans, School Improvement Plans, past strategic plans, and District Accountability Reviews.

<b>Phase 1 - Step 1: Identify key assets, issues and challenges</b>	<b>Optional tools and resources</b>
<p>Self-assessment:</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• Conduct a district self-assessment of strengths and areas for improvement related to leadership, governance and communication; curriculum and instruction; assessment; human resource management and professional development; student support; and financial and asset management.</li> <li>• Engage Level 3 schools in individual self-assessments of their strengths and areas for improvement. Use the perception data from the schools to identify district-level issues and challenges, and trends across schools.</li> <li>• Analyze the district's current capacity and processes in terms of implementing and delivering on past improvement plans (See <i>Phase I Tip: Assess Implementation Capacity</i>)</li> </ul> <p>External review:</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• Review findings from ESE district review reports.</li> </ul> <p>Data:</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• Review quantitative data currently available to the district to identify areas of strength and need related to student achievement.</li> <li>• Develop a snapshot of district and school performance and make sound, meaningful comparisons to the state or to comparable districts.</li> <li>• Review and critique a sample data overview for guidance on how to use data to identify key issues.</li> </ul>	<p><i>District Self-Assessment Tool</i>  <a href="http://www.doe.mass.edu/apa/general/">http://www.doe.mass.edu/apa/general/</a></p> <p><i>Conditions for School Effectiveness</i>  <a href="http://www.doe.mass.edu/apa/general/">http://www.doe.mass.edu/apa/general/</a></p> <p><i>District Data Team Toolkit – Module 1 Getting Ready (Taking Stock Tool 1.5.1T, Data Resources 1.5.3R); Module 3 Information (Data Analysis Protocol, Tool 3.3.1T)</i>  <a href="http://www.doe.mass.edu/apa/ucd/ddtt/toolkit.pdf#search=%22District%22">http://www.doe.mass.edu/apa/ucd/ddtt/toolkit.pdf#search=%22District%22</a></p> <p><i>Education Data Warehouse</i>  <a href="http://www.doe.mass.edu/infoservices/dw/">http://www.doe.mass.edu/infoservices/dw/</a></p> <p><i>District Analysis and Review Tool (DART)</i>  <a href="http://www.doe.mass.edu/apa/dart/">http://www.doe.mass.edu/apa/dart/</a></p> <p><i>District Data Team Toolkit – Module 2 Inquiry (Data Overview Example Resource 2.3.2R)</i>  <a href="http://www.doe.mass.edu/apa/ucd/ddtt/toolkit.pdf#search=%22District%22">http://www.doe.mass.edu/apa/ucd/ddtt/toolkit.pdf#search=%22District%22</a></p>

### **Phase 1 Tip: Develop a Guiding Coalition**

Successfully creating and implementing an AIP requires support from multiple stakeholders, and the process will greatly benefit by building a "guiding coalition", or network of support, for the improvement initiative. Ideally, **the guiding coalition will include stakeholders who can serve as critical friends, provide an objective point of view, and advocate for focusing on the few strategic, high-leverage initiatives identified in the AIP.**

#### **Resources:**

Chapter 1 in Barber, Moffit and Kihn, *Deliverology 101* (2011)  
Chapter 2 in Curtis and City, *Strategy in Action* (2010)

<b>Phase 1 - Step 2: Prioritize key issues to address</b>	<b>Optional tools and resources</b>
Synthesize data and identify three to five issues that would most directly affect the instructional core. Deprioritize issues that are not closely aligned to the district's most urgent needs, or are not closely connected to the instructional core.	<i>Initiative mapping - <u>Strategy in Action</u> "Making Sense of the Work Under Way Protocol" in Chapter 1</i>  <i>A priority matrix to assist with decision-making</i> <a href="http://www.9giantsteps.com/category/qtd/page/2/">www.9giantsteps.com/category/qtd/page/2/</a>

<b>Phase 1 - Step 3: Explore root causes</b>	<b>Optional tools and resources</b>
<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>Engage a cross-district team in conducting a root cause analysis to determine the exact nature and causes of the three to five issues that have been prioritized for action. Brainstorm hypotheses as to what has contributed to problems in these priority areas of need.</li> <li>Consult research and local expertise related to the problems the district is addressing.</li> </ul>	<i>District Data Team Toolkit – Module 4 Knowledge (Root Cause Analysis and related protocols - Why? Why? Why?, 20 Reasons, Fishbone Analysis, Graphic Representation, and Dimensions Bulls-Eye)</i> <a href="http://www.doe.mass.edu/apa/ucd/ddtt/toolkit.pdf#search=%22District%22">http://www.doe.mass.edu/apa/ucd/ddtt/toolkit.pdf#search=%22District%22</a>  <i>Affinity Protocol – <u>Strategy in Action</u> Appendix A</i>  <i>District Data Team Toolkit – Module 4 Knowledge (Connecting to Research and Local Knowledge, Problem Investigation Plan Tool 4.3.1T and Educational Research Websites Resource 4.3.2R)</i> <a href="http://www.doe.mass.edu/apa/ucd/ddtt/toolkit.pdf#search=%22District%22">http://www.doe.mass.edu/apa/ucd/ddtt/toolkit.pdf#search=%22District%22</a>



## **Phase 2: Establish Strategic Objectives and Initiatives**

Having identified priority areas for action, and explored possible root causes of problems, the next step is to develop a theory of action to guide the development of key strategic objectives and related initiatives that link directly to the instructional core. As described earlier, ESE's theory of action concerning district improvement is that *if* a Level 3 district can **define a narrow set of strategic objectives** to accelerate student learning, **execute well-defined initiatives** with a relentless focus on implementation, and **systematically monitor the impact of those initiatives** to inform mid-course corrections, *then* outcomes for students will be dramatically transformed. This *if-then* statement describes the district's overall action plan and how it expects those actions will lead to improved outcomes. This succinct summary of the district's approach to the business of teaching and learning can be a powerful tool to communicate priorities and values, focus decisions, and guide the work of all personnel in the district. For this reason, it is important to check the clarity and power of the theory of action with a few stakeholders before using it to develop the remainder of the plan.

### ***Phase 2 Tip: Develop a Communication Plan***

A structured plan for frequent, consistent communication is essential to ensure that stakeholders understand the what, why, and how of emerging strategic objectives, and provides the **opportunity to identify strategies to make the district's improvement work visible to all and to build community buy-in** to support sustainability moving forward.

A communication plan, developed during Phases 1 and 2, will help guide communications during Phases 4 (Implementation) and 5 (Monitoring and Evaluation).

#### ***Resources:***

Appendix D: Monthly Highlight Discussions  
Appendix F: Communication Organizer Template  
Chapter 5 in Barber, Moffit and Kihn, *Deliverology 101* (2011)  
Chapter 2 in Curtis & City, *Strategy in Action* (2009)

A strong theory of action can be used to guide the development of strategic objectives and initiatives. When faced with challenging circumstances, there is a temptation to create a long list of possible solutions to address the prioritized areas for action. However, experience shows that it is better to focus and do a few things very well than to try to do everything. For this reason, the strategic objectives for improvement should succinctly describe only three to five overarching areas of focus.

The strategic objectives are then used to develop specific initiatives. As with the objectives, there should be only three to five high-leverage initiatives for each objective. These initiatives may include the implementation of programs, shifts in policy, establishment of partnerships, or changes in organizational structures. It must be evident how implementing these objectives and initiatives will address the key issues identified during the district's self-assessment and analysis (phase 1). It should also be clear how each initiative will result in a tangible difference for teachers and students in all classrooms across the district.



<b>Phase 2 - Steps: Establish strategic objectives and initiatives</b>	<b>Optional tools and resources</b>
Develop a theory of action to guide the development of objectives and initiatives. Check the logic and robustness of your overall plan by listing the strategic objectives in the IF clause and what you want to achieve in the THEN clause. Also reflect carefully on the challenge questions below.	<i>Developing a theory of action – <u>Strategy in Action</u>, Chapter 5.</i>
Write strategic <i>objectives</i> – the most important three to five levers you think the system can pull to drive improved instruction and student learning. (These levers should be big and substantive enough to drive the system’s focus for three to five years.)	<i>Signs of Strategy (SOS) Rubric – <u>Strategy in Action</u>, p. 31.</i>
Write strategic <i>initiatives</i> – the specific projects you will undertake to actualize the strategic objectives. The emphasis is on initiatives/projects rather than individual action steps. (These projects may take three months or several years.)	<i>Examples of initiatives can be found in sample AIPs in Appendix B.</i>

**Challenge questions** for the development and refinement of key objectives and initiatives:

1. In what ways do these objectives and initiatives target and transform the core instructional practices that are used in every classroom across the district in order to accelerate improvement in teaching, learning, and student achievement?
2. What is different about this set of district and school-level strategies that will accelerate learning beyond what is already taking place?
3. When you review the strategic objectives and initiatives, do you understand what needs to be done differently in the district and why?
4. Can all stakeholders identify with the key issues and strategic objectives, and understand their role in implementing the plan?
5. Why are these key objectives and initiatives strong levers for change?

**Resources for developing objectives and initiatives toward the improvement of instructional practices:**

- ESE’s Learning Walkthrough Implementation Guide – Appendices 4.0 Characteristics of Standards-Based Teaching and Learning: Continuum of Practice (<http://www.doe.mass.edu/sda/ucd/walk/>)-
- Characteristics of a Standards-Based Mathematics Classroom ([http://www.doe.mass.edu/omste/news07/mathclass\\_char.doc](http://www.doe.mass.edu/omste/news07/mathclass_char.doc))
- Characteristics of a Standards-Based Science Classroom ([http://www.doe.mass.edu/omste/news07/scitechclass\\_char.pdf](http://www.doe.mass.edu/omste/news07/scitechclass_char.pdf))

**Resources for launching or improving the work of instructional teams (professional learning communities):**

- Supporting School and District Improvement with Professional Learning Communities Professional Learning Community (PLC) Guidance (<http://www.doe.mass.edu/apa/ucd/PLCguidance.pdf>)
- Common Planning Time Self-Assessment (<http://www.doe.mass.edu/apa/dart/hrpd.html>)

### **Phase 3: Set Targets for Improvement**

#### ***Delineate short-term formative benchmarks and summative assessment goals***

After identifying strategic objectives and initiatives, it is important to set targets to meet to ensure movement toward the achievement of each initiative. 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 reflect on how practice can be improved.

Clearly articulated benchmarks can help communicate expectations to educators and students involved in the work.

They also make 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. The AIP template encourages districts to establish three different types of performance benchmark targets: early evidence of change, short-term outcomes and final outcomes.

#### ***Phase 3 Tip: Effective benchmarks are...***

- **Focused and Aligned:** A strong plan will have a few strategic benchmarks, rather than an overwhelming list.
- **Useful to the Implementers:** Benchmarks provide critical data for educators implementing the plan, helping them assess its progress and understand its impact.
- **SMART:** Specific and Strategic; Measurable; Action Oriented; Rigorous, Realistic and Results-focused; and Timed. *(See Appendix C for more benchmark guidance.)*

- **Early evidence of change benchmarks** outline changes in actions, discourse, beliefs, expectations, and instructional practices. Early evidence of change benchmarks focus primarily on adult practice, either at the classroom or administrative level, but can capture shifts in student behavior as well. They can be the hardest to articulate. These foundational changes in practice will result in subsequent improvement toward meeting short-term and final outcomes. To reach the plan’s goals, educators must *change* what they are doing on a daily basis to promote improved teaching and learning.

Early evidence benchmarks are most effective when they are reviewed shortly after the implementation of the relevant activity. This allows a district to flag those areas where barriers need to be addressed to help ensure that each initiative is accelerating improvement. 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.

Examples:

- *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.*
- *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 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** are targets for improvement that can serve as indicators that the district is on track toward meeting its final annual outcomes, ideally predicting performance on the annual Massachusetts Comprehensive Assessment System (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 achieve proficiency and beyond. While short-term outcomes most often reflect student learning targets, they can also reflect adult outcomes as well. Short-term outcomes should be monitored on a quarterly basis.

Examples:

- *80% of students demonstrate improvement on interim assessments through each 6-week cycle of common unit assessments.*
- *High performing schools (95%+ attendance rate for Gr. K-8, 92%+ for Gr. 9-12) will maintain their attendance rate monthly. Lower performing schools will show monthly improvement to reach target attendance by June.*
- **Final outcomes** define the student achievement gains the district plans to accomplish given the initiatives that were established. Final outcomes typically include MCAS performance targets by the grades and subgroups that are impacted by the introduction of the strategic initiatives. 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 Progress and Performance Index (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, final outcomes could focus on district-determined assessments, student attendance, promotion and/or discipline data.

Examples:

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

<b>Phase 3 Steps: Establish early evidence of change benchmarks, short-term outcomes and final outcomes</b>	<b>Optional tools and resources</b>
<p>Articulate clear measures of implementation: early evidence of change benchmarks, short-term outcomes and final outcomes</p> <p>There is no one right process for generating ideas for benchmarks for your district. Here are some options:</p> <p><u>Option 1:</u> After outlining your strategic objectives and initiatives, brainstorm the activities needed to get those done.</p>	<p><i>District Data Team Toolkit – Module 5 Action (Crafting Meaningful Measures Checklist Tool 5.2.1T, and Elements of Well-Written Measure Resource 5.2.2R)</i></p> <p><a href="http://www.doe.mass.edu/apa/ucd/ddtt/toolkit.pdf#search=%22District%22">http://www.doe.mass.edu/apa/ucd/ddtt/toolkit.pdf#search=%22District%22</a></p>

<p>Then think about how you would know if those activities worked, and brainstorm your early evidence of change and short-term outcomes.</p> <p><u>Option 2:</u> 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.</p>	<p><i>District Accelerated Improvement Planning: Guiding Principles for Effective Benchmarks</i>  <a href="http://www.doe.mass.edu/apa/sss/turnaround/level4/AIP-GuidingPrinciples.pdf">http://www.doe.mass.edu/apa/sss/turnaround/level4/AIP-GuidingPrinciples.pdf</a></p> <p><i>Logic Model protocol – Strategy in Action (Curtis &amp; City, 2009), Appendix A</i></p> <p><i>Appendix A: Sample benchmarks in exemplary Accelerated Improvement Plans</i></p> <p><i>Appendix C: Writing Benchmarks</i></p>
-----------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------	-------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------

**Challenge questions** for the development of measureable benchmarks and outcomes:

1. Do the evidence of change and short-term outcomes:
  - a. Leave little room for interpretation and provide clarity about how adult actions matter?
  - b. Seem reasonable and meaningful to collect?
  - c. Demonstrate that the district is likely to achieve the desired outcomes?
  - d. Seem focused and aligned, telling a clear, causal story leading to transformation?
2. Is it possible to meet all the early evidence of change benchmarks and short term outcomes outlined in the plan and still not achieve the final outcomes for student learning for the year? If so, what else is needed to have a better understanding of the impact the activities and initiatives are having on teaching and learning?
  - a. Are the measures rigorous enough to signal real changes in practice?
  - b. Are there other measures of adult practice and/or student learning that would be better indicators of progress toward the final outcomes?

## **Phase 4: Implement the Plan**

### ***Identify and document activities, responsibilities and time frames***

For each initiative, the identification of activities or action steps defines what the district and schools will do to achieve the intended outcomes. The activities in the AIP define what will happen, who will lead the work, and in what time frame. It is the place to map out and sequence the steps that need to take place to implement each strategic initiative. The activities should reflect critical milestones and not the minutiae of the district's daily work. Some activities should serve to monitor the implementation of the plan. For example, activities could include monthly district leadership meetings to review steps taken toward the plan's implementation and the plan's impact, or meetings with school leadership to review data, progress, and feedback given to educators. Time frames should be specific, and it should be very clear who will lead each activity. Generalized notations like "All" or "To be determined" should be avoided. Every activity must reflect what will happen, not what could or might happen.

### ***Phase 4 Tip: Leveraging the Guiding Coalition and Communicating the Plan***

If a communications plan has been developed and a guiding coalition convened, these resources can be effectively leveraged in the implementation phase to ensure that all stakeholders understand how plan activities will be rolled out. (See pages 6 and 8 for additional guidance.)

### **Maximize communications opportunities by considering your daily work. What should you share about the AIP during meetings or other work with stakeholders?**

Effective communications are compelling, strategically directed to the right stakeholders, make use of the most appropriate messengers or media, and are delivered with consistency and confidence.

#### **Resources:**

Chapter 5 in Barber, Moffit and Kihn, *Deliverology 101*, 2011

Chapter 2 in Curtis & City, *Strategy in Action*, 2009

<b><i>Phase 4 Steps: Define activities and time frames</i></b>	<b><i>Optional tools and resources</i></b>
<ul style="list-style-type: none"><li>• For each initiative in your plan, describe the activities that are designed to achieve the outcomes for the initiative. Identify actionable steps that can serve as a checklist of what has been accomplished.</li><li>• Address key accountability questions.<ul style="list-style-type: none"><li>- Who will lead/monitor the activity?</li><li>- When it will start?</li><li>- When it will be completed?</li><li>- What resources are needed?</li></ul></li></ul>	<p><i>Exemplar plans can be found in Appendix B.</i></p> <p><i>Delivery Chain Activity—If a delivery chain was developed during Phase 1 (see Appendix E), use it here to inform Phase 4 steps.</i></p>

## **Phase 5: Monitor Progress**

***Review results of formative and summative assessments. Reflect on sustaining a culture of improvement.*** In order to sustain the AIP as a living document that focuses work across the district, it must be referenced and reflected upon frequently. In order to make the plan meaningful, a robust process for monitoring and evaluating the effectiveness of the plan toward meeting short-term and final outcomes should be adopted. Ideally the plan has outlined activities that can help monitor the success of implementation, such as monthly district leadership meetings to review the plan's implementation and impact.

A robust plan will also include systems and structures at the school and classroom level to monitor relevant aspects of the plan. For example, if an *objective* is to ensure success for all students through high quality teaching and learning, and an *initiative* is to identify a set of effective teaching practices to improve learning for all students, then the district will want to ensure that classroom educators have opportunities to reflect on their teaching, and receive feedback on their implementation of these identified practices. Regular monitoring will allow the district to assess whether a failure to meet short-term outcomes is due to the choice of initiative or the actual implementation of the initiative. With regular monitoring, the district can make mid-course corrections to better ensure that final outcomes will be met.

#### **Phase 5 Steps: Monitor and evaluate progress**

- On a **monthly** basis (minimum), review implementation of key activities and achievement of early evidence of change. Just as we want teachers to ground their discussion of students' progress with artifacts and data related to learning, monthly reviews of the AIP should be grounded with specific and tangible evidence of the district's progress in implementing the plan. The benchmarks outlined in the AIP represent agreed-upon data and artifacts that will be referenced regularly at these meetings:
  - Are activities being implemented as planned, and with fidelity?
  - Are early evidence of change benchmarks being met as expected?
  - Are short-term outcomes being met?
- On a **quarterly** basis, review short-term outcomes, and revisit final outcomes. Assemble evidence that reflects what has happened in the district toward meeting the plan's short-term outcomes. Consider developing a quarterly progress report to share with stakeholders.
- Where appropriate to the initiative, conduct classroom observations using a non-supervisory team-based Learning Walkthrough protocol. Learning Walkthroughs promote organizational learning and monitor progress at a school or within districts. They offer educators a systematic way to gather evidence to answer the question: *To what extent are we seeing what we expect to see in our classrooms given where we are focusing our energy and resources?*
- Where appropriate to the initiative, obtain data from stakeholders concerning the current use of common planning time.
- Survey stakeholders regarding desired changes in practices.
- Communicate findings with stakeholders. Once a year, consider preparing a summative report that includes:
  - A narrative summary of the district's work in implementing the AIP
  - Data showing the district's progress toward meeting final AIP outcomes
  - A narrative of progress on specific strategic objectives and initiatives
  - Recommendations for district priorities and actions in the coming year

#### **Optional tools and resources**

Appendix D—Accelerated Improvement Planning Highlight  
Discussion agenda template

Edwin, Massachusetts' new comprehensive teaching and learning platform: <http://www.doe.mass.edu/edwin/>

Learning Walkthrough Guide  
<http://www.doe.mass.edu/apa/dart/ci.html>

Common Planning Time Self-Assessment Toolkit  
<http://www.doe.mass.edu/apa/dart/hrpd.html>

Chapters 1, 3, 5 in Curtis and City, *Strategy in Action* (2009)

Communication Plan: Appendix F; Chapter 5 in Barber, Moffit and Kihn, *Deliverology 101* (2011)

Appendix E in Guidance for Level 4 Districts: Focused Planning for Accelerating Student Learning  
(<http://www.doe.mass.edu/apa/ss/turnaround/level4/quickdance-L4.pdf>)

City, Elmore, Fiarman and Teitel, *Instructional Rounds in Education: A Network Approach to Improving Teaching and Learning* (2009)



## ***Building and Sustaining a Culture of Continuous Improvement***

The AIP process does not end with progress monitoring in Phase 5. Just as the AIP phases are designed as a continuous cycle of inquiry and improvement, engaging in the process is an opportunity to build and sustain an irreversible culture of continuous improvement throughout the district.

The following **guiding questions** are designed to facilitate reflection on how the plan supports long-term capacity for continuous improvement:

- How are you building a culture of shared responsibility for student performance, so that teachers, principals, and/or district leaders see the AIP as an integral part of their work, rather than just one more fad? What will it take to get all stakeholders to buy into the work?
- Are there ongoing opportunities in daily work to embed and share the progress made through the AIP process? How might the guiding coalition and communications plan be sustained and leveraged through ongoing improvement efforts?
- How can the AIP integrate various key initiatives into a coherent improvement effort?
  - Are there AIP objectives or outcomes that may be incorporated into team goals within the Educator Evaluation framework?
  - How should aspects of the AIP support the implementation of the Massachusetts Curriculum Frameworks?
  - How does the AIP bolster the district's commitment to serving all learners, through connections to tiered systems of support and/or instruction for English Language Learners?
- In what ways does the plan support the creation and/or modification of systems, processes, and policies to ensure the work can be fully implemented and sustained?
  - Does the AIP process create opportunity for assessing the efficiency of district financial and human resource processes?
  - Are financial practices aligned to identified priorities?
  - Can teams be made more effective through investing in common planning time or implementing Professional Learning Communities?
- What structures are established to identify and celebrate progress, and to reflect honestly on what further improvements are needed?

### Works Cited:

Curtis, Rachel E. and City, Elizabeth A. *Strategy in Action*. Cambridge: Harvard Education Press, 2009.

Barber, Michael, Moffit, Andy and Kihn, Paul *Deliverology 101: A Field Guide for Educational Leaders*. Thousand Oaks, CA: Corwin, 2011.

City, Elizabeth A., Elmore, Richard F., Fiarman, Sarah E., and Teitel, Lee. *Instructional Rounds in Education: A Network Approach to Improving Teaching and Learning*. Cambridge: Harvard Education Press, 2009.



**APPENDIX A**

**[District Name]**

**Accelerated Improvement Plan**

**20\_\_ - 20\_\_**

**In this section, summarize key assets, issues and strategic objectives.**

**Create the Theory of Action that will drive the development of the Plan.**

**Next, identify the Strategic Objectives and Initiatives upon which the Plan will focus and why they are important.**

**Objective 1:**

- Initiative 1
- Initiative 2
- Initiative 3

**(etc.)**

**Describe the specific, measurable, final end-of-year outcomes the district aims to achieve by implementing the Plan. Include dates for each outcome.**

## Section 2: Initiative Strategy Sheet

(There is one Strategy Sheet for each Initiative under an Objective; duplicate as necessary)

<b>A. District Strategic Objective 1:</b>	<b>B. Overall Lead for this Objective (one person):</b>
<b>C. Initiative Number and Description:</b>	<b>D. Lead for this Initiative (one person):</b>
<b>E. Short-term outcomes for the Initiative, with dates/frequency for each:</b>	
<b>F. What are the key indicators for this Initiative to show early evidence of change? By when?</b>	
<b>G. Key resources (e.g., other leaders/supporters of the Initiative, funds, external partners, time, staffing, materials, etc.):</b>	

<b>Objective 1:</b>			
<b>Initiative 1:</b>			
<b>Activities to Achieve the Outcomes for the Initiative</b>	<b>Who will Lead?</b>	<b>When will it Start?</b>	<b>When will it be Complete?</b>

<b>Objective 1:</b>			
<b>Initiative 2:</b>			
<b>Activities to Achieve the Outcomes for the Initiative</b>	<b>Who will Lead?</b>	<b>When will it Start?</b>	<b>When will it be Complete?</b>

(Make copies for additional objectives and initiatives, as needed. It may also be helpful to copy this template into an Excel spreadsheet in order to sort and track activities.)

## APPENDIX B

### Sample Accelerated Improvement Plans

Appendix B contains four sample Accelerated Improvement Plans, excerpted from district plans submitted to the Department of Elementary and Secondary Education's Office of District & School Accountability.

Each sample plan exemplifies certain aspects of the accelerated improvement planning process. Sample plan 1, from Randolph, demonstrates a comprehensive plan, beginning with clearly summarized analysis of data, district issues, and strategic objectives. Sample plans 2 and 3, from New Bedford and Holyoke, respectively, are presented as exemplars of defining comprehensive strategies, where objectives and initiatives are well aligned. Sample plan 4, from Fall River, provides a good example of defining a through line within the plan, running clearly from objective to initiative to benchmarks and then to activities.

The full Accelerated Improvement Plans referenced in this Appendix are available on the District Review Reports pages of ESE's website. **Plans are updated annually.**

**Read updated plans at:** <http://www.doe.mass.edu/apa/accountability/dr/reports.html?district=F-J>

#### Sample Plan 1: Randolph

**In this section, summarize key assets, issues and strategic objectives.**

After careful analysis of the ESE District Review, perceptual data from the District Self-Assessment and Conditions of School Effectiveness, MCAS student performance over a five-year period, Student Growth Percentile data, and parent surveys, district leadership has identified the following key issues that need to be addressed in our district's improvement plan:

- Literacy and numeracy skills, as demonstrated on MCAS, are below state averages.
- Efforts to improve the performance of students receiving special education services have not resulted in improved MCAS results.
- The development of 21<sup>st</sup> century skills (critical thinking and problem-solving, creativity, communication and collaboration) has not received attention through curriculum planning and implementation, and monitoring of classroom practice. Instruction does not foster higher-order thinking skills.
- Professional development offerings have not been explicitly aligned to data regarding student performance.
- Accountability systems have not been established to ensure the effective supervision and evaluation of district actions.

Upon review of the key issues impacting student performance, we have identified three strategic objectives to ensure that all of our students reach their full potential. These strategic objectives provide a clear and targeted focus on high quality teaching and learning, teacher development through embedded professional development, student support through systematic interventions and improved accountability.

**Create the Theory of Action that will drive the development of the Plan.**

***If*** the district aligns resources, practices and policies to relentlessly focus on the instructional core through student-centered learning, with each person in the organization sharing responsibility for our work, ***then*** our students will reach 95% proficiency in their academic performance.

**Next, identify the Strategic Objectives and Initiatives upon which the Plan will focus and why they are important.**

**Objective 1: Ensure success for all students through high quality teaching and learning**

**Initiative 1:** Align K-12 instructional materials (curriculum and assessments) to the 2011 MA Frameworks for math and English language arts (ELA)

**Initiative 2:** Identify a set of effective teaching practices to improve learning for all students

**Initiative 3:** Develop systems and practices to ensure the academic growth of targeted subgroups of students

**Objective 2: Ensure success for all students through the provision of high quality professional development to teachers**

**Initiative 1:** Provide training and support in the implementation of newly aligned curriculum materials

**Initiative 2:** Provide training and support in understanding and using the identified set of effective teaching practices

**Initiative 3:** Provide training and support to ensure academic growth of targeted student populations

**Objective 3: Ensure success for all students through the use of high quality accountability systems**

**Initiative 1:** K-12 implementation of quarterly assessments aligned to the 2011 MA Frameworks

**Initiative 2:** Establish accountability for the use of teaching practices that meet the needs of all students

**Initiative 3:** Accountability for implementing new systems and practices to ensure the growth of target student populations

**Describe the specific, measurable, final end-of-year outcomes the district aims to achieve by implementing the Plan. Include dates for each outcome.**

The district will meet the gain target for the 2013 MCAS of 5.0 in ELA and 7.0 in mathematics.

Median student growth profile will increase to 60 in grades 3-6 and maintain at existing levels for grades 7, 8 and 10.

## Section 2: Initiative Strategy Sheet

<b>A. District Strategic Objective 1:</b> Ensure success for all students through high quality teaching and learning.	<b>B. Overall Lead for this Objective (one person):</b> Superintendent
<b>B. Initiative Number and Description:</b> 1. Align K-12 instructional materials (curriculum and assessments) to the 2011 MA Frameworks for math and English language arts (ELA).	<b>D. Lead for this Initiative (one person):</b> Curriculum directors (or assistant superintendent)
<b>E. Short-term outcomes for the Initiative, with dates/frequency for each:</b> <ul style="list-style-type: none"><li>• 85% of agendas and minutes from common planning time (CPT) meetings show that teachers in grades K-12 are using formative and benchmark assessments to plan lessons</li><li>• 75% of quarterly assessments show an increase in student performance in math and ELA</li></ul>	
<b>F. What are the key indicators for this Initiative to show early evidence of change? By when?</b> <ul style="list-style-type: none"><li>• 100% of the District Instructional Leadership Team members have demonstrated a verbal commitment to participating in curriculum alignment activities</li></ul>	
<b>G. Key resources (e.g., other leaders/supporters of the Initiative, funds, external partners, time, staffing, materials, etc.):</b> Funds for printing documents, PD, staff time, school schedule and staff to provide coverage	

## Section 2: Initiative Strategy Sheet

<b>A. District Strategic Objective 1:</b> Ensure success for all students through high quality teaching and learning.	<b>B. Overall Lead for this Objective (one person):</b> Superintendent
<b>C. Initiative Number and Description:</b> 2. Identify a set of effective teaching practices to improve learning for all students.	<b>D. Lead for this Initiative (one person):</b> Principals
<b>E. Short-term outcomes for the Initiative, with dates/frequency for each:</b> <ul style="list-style-type: none"><li>80% of principals are providing teachers with feedback that is specific and grounded in the district's expectations for effective teaching practices</li><li>Monthly district monitoring Learning Walkthrough data shows a 10% improvement rate in the implementation of targeted teaching behaviors and practices</li></ul>	
<b>F. What are the key indicators for this Initiative to show early evidence of change? By when?</b> <ul style="list-style-type: none"><li>100% of principals have conducted co-observations with the Superintendent, Plan Manager and/or mentors to calibrate district expectations for effective teaching practices</li></ul>	
<b>G. Key resources (e.g., other leaders/supporters of the Initiative, funds, external partners, time, staffing, materials, etc.):</b> Time	



<b>Objective 1: Ensure success for all students through high quality teaching and learning.</b>			
<b>Initiative 1:</b> Align K-12 instructional materials (curriculum and assessments) to the 2011 MA Frameworks for math and English language arts (ELA)			
<b>Activities to Achieve the Outcomes for the Initiative</b>	<b>Who will Lead?</b>	<b>When will it Start?</b>	<b>When will it be Complete?</b>
Create document outlining roles and responsibilities for district administrative staff in implementing curriculum alignment initiative	Superintendent	July 2012	August 2012
Establish and implement grade level and content teams for math and ELA in order to develop curriculum alignment documents	Curriculum directors	July 2012	June 2013
Common planning time meetings begin (twice weekly focusing on math and ELA)	Principals	Sept. 2012	2012-13
Grade level teams review and reflect on quarterly assessment results and develop action plans to address identified strengths and areas of need	Principals	December 2012	2012-13
<b>Initiative 2:</b> Identify a set of effective teaching practices to improve learning for all students			
<b>Activities to Achieve the Outcomes for the Initiative</b>	<b>Who will Lead?</b>	<b>When will it Start?</b>	<b>When will it be Complete?</b>
Develop set of new expectations for supervision and evaluation of teaching staff (number of required weekly informal observations with feedback)	District leadership	July 2012	August 2012
Opening day launch to introduce teaching staff to new expectations for learning and teaching	Superintendent	August 2012	August 2012
Common planning time facilitators use new expectations to guide work with teachers	Program directors Principals	September 2012	Ongoing
Monthly early release days are used to reinforce new teaching and learning expectations with all teaching staff	Program directors Principals	September 2012	Ongoing
District leadership review assessment results to inform future PD needs	Superintendent	November 2012	June 2013

## Sample Plan 2: New Bedford

*Theory of Action: We believe that if there is a clear focus on the effective delivery of an aligned curriculum by high quality teachers who employ the use of student data to drive instruction, students will be engaged, learn at proficient and advanced levels, and graduate college and career ready.*

### **Objective 1: Prepare all students for college and career success by implementing rigorous standards**

Initiative 1.1: Align curriculum to the 2011 MA Curriculum Frameworks in ELA & Literacy and Math and the 2012 WIDA standards in collaboration with principals, directors, and school level staff

Initiative 1.2: Reinforce high expectations for all students in writing across curriculum in all content areas

Initiative 1.3: Ensure an aligned high-quality core curriculum is taught to all students

### **Objective 2: Develop a collaborative culture of using data to improve instructional practice and decision-making**

Initiative 2.1: Expand the capacity of teachers to regularly embed on-going monitoring into instruction to close gaps in student learning

Initiative 2.2: Expand the capacity of district and school leadership to use assessment data to guide improvements in teaching and learning

### **Objective 3: Expand school and staff capacity to deliver effective engaging instruction to all students**

Initiative 3.1: Build instructional capacity of teachers to ensure all students can access and approach challenging curriculum

Initiative 3.2: Improve the effectiveness of district and school instructional leaders

### **Objective 4: Raise expectations for student achievement and increase student ownership of their learning in collaboration with families and community organizations**

Initiative 4.1: Raise student attendance by strengthening policies and practices, and deepening partnerships between schools, students, and families

Initiative 4.2: Raise the 4-year graduation rate by strengthening the core program and a systemic approach to providing academic support and providing alternative pathways to college and career readiness

### Sample District 3: Holyoke

#### Theory of Action

*We believe that if we work as a cohesive system focused on:*

- *improving the instructional core as the key variable in improving student achievement;*
- *continuously advancing rigorous instruction through a collaborative culture and continuous data analysis; and*
- *involving all stakeholders in supporting a literacy-focused curriculum across core subjects and grade levels, then*

*every student will graduate from high school ready for college success without remediation and for career success as a citizen in a global society.*

#### **Four Strategic Objectives for SY2012-13**

Building upon the supports, processes and structures that have been developed in the previous year, the district has set the same four Strategic Objectives for SY2012-2013. These objectives are all focused on the central task of **IMPROVING CORE READING AND MATH INSTRUCTION FOR ALL STUDENTS, WITH A FOCUS ON STUDENTS WITH DISABILITIES AND STUDENTS WITH LIMITED ENGLISH PROFICIENCY**. We believe the Strategic Objectives complement and reinforce one another to provide a powerful plan for improvement.

- **Strategic Objective #1: IMPROVE INSTRUCTIONAL QUALITY** by building leadership capacity throughout the district to continuously improve teaching and learning.
  - Continue to build structures and systems for building instructional leadership at the district level, within schools, and within every classroom
    - Improvement Plans (district, schools, departments) and monitoring
    - High performing teams - District Instructional Leadership Team (DILT) and School Instructional Leadership Teams (SILT)
    - Classroom walkthroughs/observations and feedback
  - Focus capacity-building on key areas of need including increasing instructional rigor and targeting high need ELL and Students with Disabilities (SWD) populations.

- **Strategic Objective #2: USING DATA EFFECTIVELY** through a cycle of inquiry to examine and improve practice on a continuous basis especially in ELA and mathematics
  - Continue to create uniformity in district common assessments, data systems, and data collection
  - Deepen district use of data to improve instruction through a data cycle
    - Through a collaboration with the District Management Council and the Achievement Network the district will:
      - Administer 4 interim assessments in math and ELA for grades 3-8
      - Be provided with in-depth assistance in analyzing the assessment results including: student summaries by whole school, class, grade and student level and item analysis by grade
      - Be supported in goal setting for student performance and implementation strategies for re-teaching essential standards
- **Strategic Objective #3: FOCUS ON LITERACY**
- In grades K-8 the district will:
  - Continue to improve implementation of best practices in literacy
    - Define expectations for implementation of standards-based balanced literacy model using readers/writers workshop
    - Use formative and summative ELA assessments to identify strengths and areas of need, and analyze data to plan instruction
    - Focus on making effective use of instructional time
    - Focus on five elements of good teaching
    - Develop a system to teach teachers how to improve their practice
  - Increase focus on providing supports to struggling students
    - Ensure ELL students and SWD have access to core literacy program
    - Implement and monitor appropriate tier II and/or tier III intervention programs
  - Increase the number of skilled teachers of reading available to students
    - With support from an external consultant the district will use the budget cycle to develop criteria-based staffing guidelines based on desired student outcomes
- At the high schools in grades 9-12 the district will:
  - Focus on improving best practices in literacy
    - Mirror the quarterly assessment process used by the science department with the ELA and/or social studies departments to identify strengths and areas of need through the analysis of data to plan instruction
    - Focus on making effective use of instructional time
    - Focus on five elements of good teaching
  - Increase the number of skilled teachers of reading available to students
    - With support from an external consultant the district will use the budget cycle to develop criteria-based staffing guidelines based on desired student outcomes

### Sample Plan 3: Fall River

<p style="text-align: center;"><b>District Theory of Action</b></p> <p style="text-align: center;">If all improvement efforts are strategically aligned to improve delivery of effective, high quality, and rigorous instruction,  <i>and</i>  if we as a staff collectively engage in the implementation of those efforts,  <i>and</i>  if we utilize our communication networks to monitor, support, and provide feedback on educator performance,  <i>then</i>  each student will receive a high quality education that prepares them to be successful in college and future careers.</p>	
<p><b>Objective 1: Ensure success for all students through high quality, rigorous teaching and learning leading to high academic achievement</b></p> <p>The district's mission is to prepare all students for success in college and careers. This can only be achieved through the teaching and learning of a rigorous curriculum, aligned with 21<sup>st</sup> century skills (e.g., critical thinking, problem solving, and real-world applications). The purpose of Strategic Objective 2 is to define such rigorous learning expectations, and provide teachers with the tools and knowledge they will need to ensure that <i>all</i> students achieve those college and career readiness expectations. These efforts are currently focused on implementing the instructional shifts of the Common Core that emphasize improved focus, coherence, and rigor across content areas.</p>	
Strategic Initiative	Early Evidence of Change, Short-term Outcomes, and Final Outcomes
<p><b>1. <i>Improve quality and consistency of curriculum through the alignment to 2011 MA Curriculum Frameworks and the establishment of cycle of continuous curriculum review and refinement.</i></b></p> <p>The Common Core State Standards, and its subsequent MA adoption, provides a lens through which to examine the level of rigor in terms of college and career expectations of the district's existing curricula. Issues of text complexity, evidence and text-based discussions, and the ownership of literacy across all content areas signals a significant shift in curriculum. In mathematics, the emphasis on focus, coherence, and deep understanding support our earlier math curriculum initiatives. However, the movement of topics vertically across grade levels demands a shift and need for re-alignment. Curriculum alignment work began last year through two avenues: ad hoc district vertical teams (science, algebra and ELA 6-12) and instructional coaching networks (elementary math, elementary ELA). This work is in its final stages of completion for math and ELA, but is in initial stages for science and social studies.</p>	<p><b>Early Evidence</b></p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>90% of classroom observations indicate that classroom lessons are aligned with existing curriculum maps for all content areas--math, ELA, science, and social studies.</li> </ul> <p><b>Short Term Outcomes</b></p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>District benchmarks that assess Common Core instructional priorities for math and non-fiction show a 10-15% improvement in percentage of students scoring proficient--<i>(same short term outcomes as Strategic Objective 1, Strategic Initiative 2).</i></li> </ul> <p><b>Final Outcomes</b></p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>MCAS scores meet CPI Growth Targets for math, literacy, and science for all grade levels.</li> <li>10% Increase in students scoring advanced in math, ELA, and science.</li> </ul>

Quarter	Activities to Achieve the Outcomes for the Initiative	Who will Lead?	When will it Start?	When will it be Complete?	What Resources are Needed?
June 2012	Literacy coaches provide PD to teachers on PARCC's framework and how it was used to develop the writing units for grades 3-5	Literacy Director	June 2012	June 2012	n/a
July 2012	ELA maps for grades 6-12 Units 1 & 2 are complete. Elementary Math Maps are completed for Review by CAO Curriculum resources are identified and ordered	ELA Lead Teacher  Assistant Superintendent	July 2012	August 2012	Customized Core for 6-12. Additional math texts and supplemental materials.
July 2012	Principals provided PD on Instructional Shifts related to the Common Core during Principal Institute	Superintendent and Assistant Superintendent	July 2012	July 2012	n/a
September 2012	District kick-off Session on Common Core: Instructional Shifts	Superintendent and Assistant Superintendent	September 4, 2012	September 4, 2012	n/a
September 2012	Launch of ELA Units 1 & 2 for grades 6-12; Launch of writing units (argumentative, explanatory & narrative) for grades 3-5	ELA Lead Teacher Literacy Director	September 2012	September 2012	n/a
September 2012	Instructional Coaching Networks revise district benchmark assessments to be aligned with PARCC Model Content Frameworks	Assistant Superintendent & Literacy Director	September 2012	June 2013	n/a
October 2012	Secondary ELA vertical team begins the work on writing units and continues the work on the reading units 3 & 4 for grades 6-12.	ELA Lead Teacher	October 2012	December 2012	Stipends (for 10 members for 20 hours of work at a rate of \$30 per hour for a total of \$6,000).
October 2012	Ad hoc science & social studies vertical teams grades K-12 begin redesign of curriculum maps and district assessments to reflect Standards for Informational Text and ELA Standards for social studies, science, and technical subjects.	Literacy Director & Instructional Services Director	October 2012	June 2013	Stipends for vertical teams (estimated at 15 members for 30 hours of work at a rate of \$30 per hour for a total of \$13,500).
October 2012	Literacy coaches provide embedded PD for teachers in grades 3-5 on the rubrics for the writing units	Literacy Director	October 2012	June 2013	n/a

Quarter	Activities to Achieve the Outcomes for the Initiative	Who will Lead?	When will it Start?	When will it be Complete?	What Resources are Needed?
December 2012	SRV Cycle I Report is conducted and identifies <i>status</i> of early evidence of change of this initiative through examination of lesson plans, walkthrough observational data, formal and informal feedback to teachers and other sources. (See Objective 1, Strategic Initiative 1)	School Review Partners & Chief Academic Officer	December 2012	December 2012	n/a
January 2013	Launch of ELA Units 3 & 4 for grades 6-12	ELA Lead Teacher	January 2013	January 2013	n/a
January 2013	Launch Winter District Benchmark Assessments for science grades 4-8, and social studies, grades 4-8	Director of Student Assessment	January 2013	January 2013	n/a
March 2013	Launch Spring District Benchmark Assessments for science grades 4-8, and social studies, grades 4-8	Director of Student Assessment	March 2013	March 2013	n/a
March 2013	SRV Cycle II Report is conducted and identifies <b>change in</b> early evidence of change of this initiative through examination of lesson plans, walkthrough observational data, formal and informal feedback to teachers and other sources. (See Objective 1, Strategic Initiative 1).	School Review Partners & Chief Academic Officer	March 2013	March 2013	n/a
June 2013	SRV Cycle III Report is conducted and identifies <i>end of year status</i> of early evidence of change of this initiative through examination of lesson plans, walkthrough observational data, formal and informal feedback to teachers and other sources. (See Objective 1, Strategic Initiative 1).	School Review Partners & Chief Academic Officer	June 2013	June 2013	n/a



## APPENDIX C

### Writing Benchmarks

In terms of crafting the benchmarks themselves, it can be hard to get them just 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 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:

**Additional Benchmark Guidance**  
*District Accelerated Improvement  
 Planning: Guiding Principles for Effective  
 Benchmarks*

<http://www.doe.mass.edu/apa/ss/turnaround/level4/AIP-GuidingPrinciples.pdf>

<b>ORIGINAL</b>	<b>FIRST REVISION</b>	<b>SECOND REVISION</b>
<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>	<b><i>By Oct 15<sup>th</sup>, 100% of teachers develop and use SMART goals aligned to SIPs as evidenced by... (Specific timing)</i></b>
<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>	<b><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></b>
<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>	<b><i>By November, 60% of classrooms are at least "Providing" .... This will increase at least 5 points in each subsequent month.</i></b>  <b><i>Each month, all principals improve in the quality of feedback to teachers, as measured by ratings on a district rubric ...</i></b>  <i>(Specific timing for performance and measurable improvement)</i>

## **APPENDIX D**

### **Monthly Highlight Discussions Guidance and Agenda Template**

#### **Purpose**

In order to keep the Accelerated Improvement Plan (AIP) a living document that focuses work across the district, it must be referenced and reflected upon frequently.

Highlight discussions are monthly meetings designed to focus on what has occurred the preceding month, based on the work outlined in the AIP. The discussion should be firmly focused on the specific activities and outcomes listed in the AIP; over the course of a three-month period, highlight discussions should address all aspects of the district's accepted plan. For this reason, it is essential that a district's AIP represent an agreed-upon vision and benchmarks for the district, because the activities, early evidence of change, and short-term outcomes will serve as the basis for these monthly discussions.

The goals for a Highlight Discussion are:

- Continue to ground the district's work in its 3-5 year vision and the key principles of the AIP process
- Keep the plan a living document that focuses and guides the district's work
- Reflect on accomplishments and progress made (both process and performance)
- Note challenges that have arisen, and identify additional support that may be needed
- Agree on key areas for improvement in the coming month
- Identify any key risks or variables that could undermine the success of the plan
- Note any significant modifications to the plan going forward and the reasons for these changes
- Provide feedback on the AIP process as a whole to inform ESE support, guidance, and expectations

#### **Evidence**

Just as we want teachers to ground their discussion of students with artifacts and data of a student's learning progress, the monthly Highlight Discussion should be grounded with specific and tangible evidence of the district's progress in implementing the AIP. The benchmarks outlined in the AIP represent agreed-upon data and artifacts that will be referenced regularly at these meetings. Questions to be discussed include:

- Are activities being implemented as planned, and with fidelity?
- Are Early Evidence of Change benchmarks being met as expected?
- Are Short-Term Outcomes being met?

District teams should come to a Highlight Discussion prepared to discuss select benchmarks. This involves assembling relevant data and artifacts ahead of time, as well as spending some time analyzing the evidence so the Highlight Discussion can focus on what the district has learned. To ensure the usefulness of Highlight Discussions for all involved, the specific evidence to be presented and plan elements to be discussed at each meeting should be agreed upon in advance. This identification of evidence should be a regular part of each discussion so that there is a shared understanding of what data and artifacts most clearly represent the district's progress.

**Accelerated Improvement Planning  
Monthly Highlight Discussion  
*Suggested Agenda & Template for Meeting Minutes***

<b>District:</b>	
<b>Meeting participants:</b>	
<b>Highlight Discussion date:</b>	
<b>Date of previous Highlight Discussion:</b>	
<b>Report submission date:</b>	
<b>Submitted by:</b>	

1. **Accomplishments and progress** (both process and performance). Please list specific evidence referenced.
  
2. **Challenges** to implementation (if any). Please note any additional targeted assistance that may be needed
  
3. **Risks** to successful implementation in the coming months (if any). Include an action plan for mitigating these risks.
  
4. **Next steps** for the coming month (if not articulated above).
  
5. **Key modifications to the plan** and the reasons for these changes (if necessary).
  
6. **Debrief.** What are the key take-aways from the meeting? (for all stakeholders present). Outstanding questions/concerns? Suggestions for improvement of future Highlight Discussions?

## APPENDIX E

### **The Delivery Chain as a Diagnostic and Planning Tool** *Adapted from Barber, Moffit and Kihn, Deliverology 101 (2011)*

A delivery chain is the set of system actors (people or organizations), and the relationships between them, through which a given system activity will be implemented. A delivery chain has one question at its core: Starting from the policy intent of a leader in your system and ending with the frontline behaviors and practices that this policy is designed to influence, how—and through whom—does a system activity actually happen?

To conduct a delivery chain analysis, ask the following questions:

- Who are all the system actors (people or organizations) that could conceivably be involved, directly or indirectly, in implementing or influencing the implementation of this activity? Remember that this does not just include line authority in your system, which in any case may be unclear; in it also includes actors who may have informal but significant influence.
- For each system actor, what role does that individual play in influencing or contributing to the implementation of the activity? How large is his or her influence relative to other system actors?
- What are all the relationships of influence between these system actors? For each relationship:
  - In which direction does influence flow (from whom to whom)?
  - Is it formal (line authority) or informal influence?
  - How strong or weak is the influence?

Your answers to these questions should help you to draw a map of the delivery chain for each activity. See the next page for an example of a detailed delivery chain for an after-school literacy program.

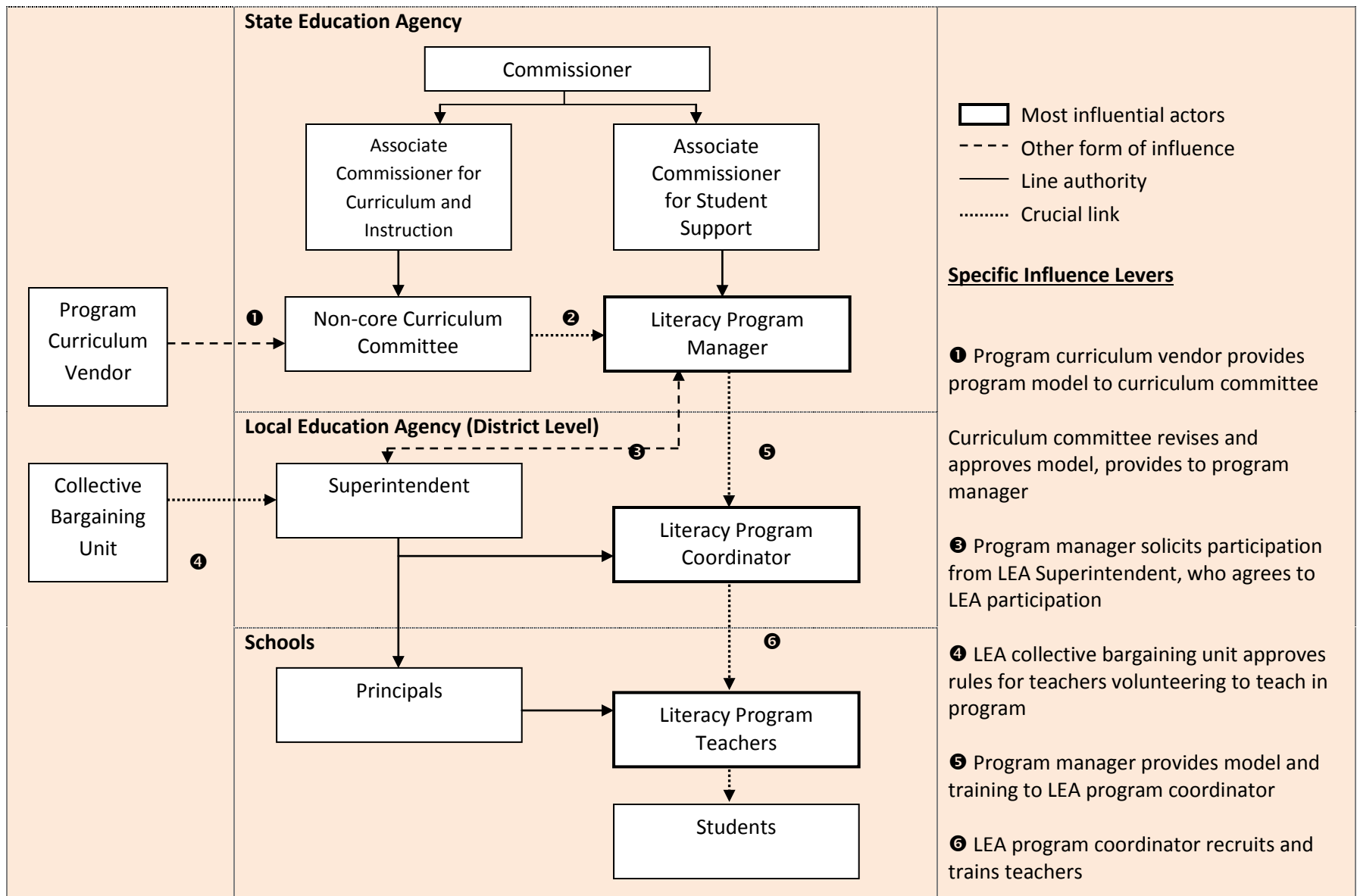
Delivery chains paint a picture of how easily (or not) intent at the system level will translate to impact at the student level. As such, they are useful tools for helping you to evaluate and improve the effectiveness of implementation. The ensuing evaluation of each activity should instead ask the question: Where are the weak links, and what can be done to strengthen the delivery chain?

Evaluate the delivery chain for areas to improve by asking:

- What are the problem areas in which implementation could go wrong?
- For each problem area, can you trace it back to a design weakness in the delivery chain? There are two types of weaknesses:
  - *Weak links*: Actors who are not playing their intended roles in a relationship or in a relationship that is flawed
  - *Unnecessary complexity*: Does an activity require approval, permission and/or input from too many people? Are there ways you can streamline the chain?



**Example: Delivery chain for an after-school literacy program**



## **APPENDIX F**

### Communication Organizer Template

Adapted from The Department of Elementary & Secondary Education's *District Data Team Toolkit*

Module 6 Results (Communication Organizer Tool 6.2.1T)

<http://www.doe.mass.edu/apa/ucd/ddtt/toolkit.pdf#search=%22District%22>

This template can be used to organize communication planning. It helps users identify the specific findings that they need to share from an activity, as well as the audiences with whom they need to communicate. Estimated completion time is 30 minutes to 1 hour.

What needs to be communicated? (Finding or Message)	To whom? (Audience)	Why?		By When? (Deadline)	How? (Communication Tools/Venues)	By whom? (Person Responsible)
		(What do we want them to know?)	(How do we hope they use this information?)			
	<input type="checkbox"/> School Board <input type="checkbox"/> District Leadership Team <input type="checkbox"/> District Data Team <input type="checkbox"/> School Improvement Team <input type="checkbox"/> School Faculty <input type="checkbox"/> Parents <input type="checkbox"/> Students <input type="checkbox"/> Other _____				<input type="checkbox"/> Annual report <input type="checkbox"/> Quarterly report <input type="checkbox"/> District newsletter <input type="checkbox"/> Data wall displays <input type="checkbox"/> Website <input type="checkbox"/> Email to relevant audience <input type="checkbox"/> Presentation <input type="checkbox"/> Other _____	
	<input type="checkbox"/> School Board <input type="checkbox"/> District Leadership Team <input type="checkbox"/> District Data Team <input type="checkbox"/> School Improvement Team <input type="checkbox"/> School Faculty <input type="checkbox"/> Parents <input type="checkbox"/> Students <input type="checkbox"/> Other _____				<input type="checkbox"/> Annual report <input type="checkbox"/> Quarterly report <input type="checkbox"/> District newsletter <input type="checkbox"/> Data wall displays <input type="checkbox"/> Website <input type="checkbox"/> Email to relevant audience <input type="checkbox"/> Presentation <input type="checkbox"/> Other _____	



What needs to be communicated? <i>(Finding or Message)</i>	To whom? <i>(Audience)</i>	Why?		By When? <i>(Deadline)</i>	How? <i>(Communication Tools/Venues)</i>	By whom? <i>(Person Responsible)</i>
		<i>(What do we want them to know?)</i>	<i>(How do we hope they use this information?)</i>			
	<input type="checkbox"/> School Board <input type="checkbox"/> District Leadership Team <input type="checkbox"/> District Data Team <input type="checkbox"/> School Improvement Team <input type="checkbox"/> School Faculty <input type="checkbox"/> Parents <input type="checkbox"/> Students <input type="checkbox"/> Other _____				<input type="checkbox"/> Annual report <input type="checkbox"/> Quarterly report <input type="checkbox"/> District newsletter <input type="checkbox"/> Data wall displays <input type="checkbox"/> Website <input type="checkbox"/> Email to relevant audience <input type="checkbox"/> Presentation <input type="checkbox"/> Other _____	
	<input type="checkbox"/> School Board <input type="checkbox"/> District Leadership Team <input type="checkbox"/> District Data Team <input type="checkbox"/> School Improvement Team <input type="checkbox"/> School Faculty <input type="checkbox"/> Parents <input type="checkbox"/> Students <input type="checkbox"/> Other _____				<input type="checkbox"/> Annual report <input type="checkbox"/> Quarterly report <input type="checkbox"/> District newsletter <input type="checkbox"/> Data wall displays <input type="checkbox"/> Website <input type="checkbox"/> Email to relevant audience <input type="checkbox"/> Presentation <input type="checkbox"/> Other _____	
	<input type="checkbox"/> School Board <input type="checkbox"/> District Leadership Team <input type="checkbox"/> District Data Team <input type="checkbox"/> School Improvement Team <input type="checkbox"/> School Faculty <input type="checkbox"/> Parents <input type="checkbox"/> Students <input type="checkbox"/> Other _____				<input type="checkbox"/> Annual report <input type="checkbox"/> Quarterly report <input type="checkbox"/> District newsletter <input type="checkbox"/> Data wall displays <input type="checkbox"/> Website <input type="checkbox"/> Email to relevant audience <input type="checkbox"/> Presentation <input type="checkbox"/> Other _____	

