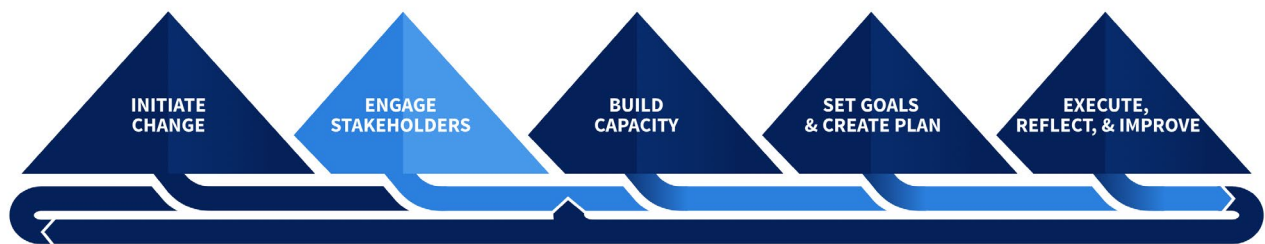# GEORGE W. BUSH INSTITUTE

EFFECTIVE IMPLEMENTATION FRAMEWORK

VISION TO REALITY

INTRODUCTION

The Effective Implementation Framework describes how to manage complex changes to practice and policy.

Research-based initiatives should drive what happens in classrooms and schools. However, too often we see that new education initiatives fade away mid-year or that they have mixed results. Commonly the "what" – the new program or initiative – is where leaders solely put their focus. As a result, improvement is usually anecdotal and sporadic.

We believe that considering "how" to implement that new initiative is just as important. The Effective Implementation Framework was created to address this gap between vision and reality directly. The framework outlines the work and resources required to meaningfully change practice or policy in an organization in service of student success.

INITIATE CHANGE

Every change starts somewhere.

A. ESTABLISH VISION

Create a vision statement

Best Practice: District leaders create a consistent and compelling vision statement for change.

Establish rationale for change

Best Practice: District leaders can justify why change is needed, including articulating a theory of action that demonstrates how changes will lead to both short- and long-term outcomes. As a result, stakeholders understand both the need to move away from the status quo and the promise of achieving the shared vision.

B. ESTABLISH FOUNDATION

Identify costs and benefits of change

Best Practice: District leaders identify known and potential costs and benefits of change for the district. The cost-benefit analysis is informed and confirmed by a variety of sources (e.g., stakeholder feedback, budget constraints, timing constraints, people capacity constraints, impact opportunities, best practice, and relevant research). Leaders also know that there may be risks and opportunities not yet understood.

Establish guiding coalition of champions

Best Practice: District leaders build a coalition of champions, key stakeholders who assume the responsibility of launching, rallying, and sustaining change efforts. Champions may include the superintendent, senior district leaders, and other key stakeholders (such as principals, teachers, parents, community members, and school board members). They agree with, and work to build buy-in for, the vision for change.

Create a sense of urgency and excitement

Best Practice: District leaders create a sense of urgency such that stakeholders are genuinely excited by the vision for change, understand why immediate action is needed, and are eager to contribute to change efforts.

QUESTIONS TO ASK ABOUT INITIATING CHANGE

1. Is there a clear, ambitious, and achievable vision statement guiding our change effort?
2. Does the vision statement drive all plans, decisions, and actions?
3. Can leaders and stakeholders describe why this change is needed?
4. Is there a commonly understood theory of action aligned to the vision?
5. Do leaders use data and other evidence to understand costs and benefits of the change before diving in?
6. Is there a coalition of champions?
7. What would help build a sense of excitement and urgency about your change?

ENGAGE STAKEHOLDERS

Successful change depends on its stakeholders.

A. UNDERSTAND STAKEHOLDERS

Identify stakeholders and their motivations

Best Practice: District leaders identify stakeholder groups and their interests. They can anticipate champions, undecideds, and resistors and identify competing or aligned priorities between groups.

Invite and strategically use feedback

Best Practice: District leaders demonstrably seek honest feedback from all stakeholders. District leaders effectively communicate how feedback is being used and set expectations that all feedback will be heard but not all feedback may be incorporated. They carefully evaluate feedback and incorporate elements that add the most value.

B. UNDERSTAND THE CHALLENGE AND SET EXPECTATIONS

Assess current state and use results

Best Practice: District leaders use data to assess the current state and use results to guide their ongoing planning. They continuously assess over time and adjust accordingly.

Understand root causes of current performance

Best Practice: District leaders investigate and can clearly explain why performance trends are occurring. They use a variety of information sources (e.g., surveys, data analysis, artifact review, observations, etc.) to determine root causes.

Set expectations and encourage persistence through distractions

Best Practice: District leaders ensure that stakeholders clearly understand the cycle of implementation will include both successes and setbacks. District leaders stay the course and demonstrably support, encourage, and incentivize others to do the same.

C. EFFECTIVELY COMMUNICATE

Strategically plan communication

Best Practice: The implementation team considers when and how to best deliver specific content. They codify due dates, methods, and owners into a communication plan or project work plan.

Tailor message to audience

Best Practice: District leaders deliberately craft messaging that is compelling, often by incorporating hope and a sense of possibility. They also acknowledge concerns and risks. If a leader is not familiar with a particular audience, they seek help to improve their understanding. Effective communicators are consistent with messaging but can adapt to a range of audiences to support broad understanding.

Incorporate effective communication techniques

Best Practice: District leaders use a variety of communication techniques to achieve desired impact. Examples of communication techniques include telling stories, leveraging quantitative data, removing jargon, evoking emotion, utilizing visuals, and preferencing face-to-face communication when possible.

Build momentum by celebrating success

Best Practice: District leaders publicly celebrate wins quickly and consistently. In doing so, they reinforce how successes are moving the organization towards the vision, and they are modeling a strong cultural practice.

Over-communicate and check for understanding

Best Practice: District leaders intentionally over-communicate by sharing the same message in multiple ways (e.g. email, face-to-face, newsletter, etc.). They value transparency. They purposefully check for understanding and action to determine whether their messaging is successful. They identify ways to improve their communication.

QUESTIONS TO ASK ABOUT ENGAGING STAKEHOLDERS

1. Have district leaders identified all stakeholder groups?

2. Do leaders know – within and across stakeholder groups – who are champions, neutral, or resistors?

3. Do leaders seek and incorporate feedback from stakeholders when planning?

4. Do leaders use a current state assessment to drive planning?

5. Do leaders seek to understand root causes of current performance, both good and bad?

6. Do district leaders demonstrate persistence and encourage others to do the same throughout both success and setbacks?

7. Are communication efforts effective? How do you know?

8. Is there a communication plan that is tailored to all stakeholder audiences?

9. Do leaders celebrate quick wins?

BUILD CAPACITY

Moving from vision to reality requires investment.

A. INVEST IN CHANGE

Ensure leadership support

Best Practice: Critical high-level leaders (e.g. the board, superintendent, and/or other senior district leaders) visibly support the vision and strategy, enabling a "sponsorship spine" to drive change.

Create implementation team(s)

Best Practice: District leaders build an implementation team(s) of the most essential stakeholders necessary to bring about change. The team members clearly understand their roles, responsibilities, and who is accountable for each step. Recognition of effort and success is shared.

Invest resources

Best Practice: District leaders invest extensive resources of time, people, and money in making change occur (e.g., they create specific teams focused on the change process; they allocate sustainable, protected funding; etc.).

B. OPTIMIZE INDIVIDUAL EFFECTIVENESS

Build content expertise

Best Practice: District leaders build the team's (and other stakeholders as needed) content expertise related to the change efforts through coaching and by using relevant research, best practice, and experts (e.g., district leaders use a current state assessment to determine opportunities for improvement; district leaders hire or consult content experts; etc.).

Build understanding

Best Practice: District leaders create frequent, meaningful opportunities to build stakeholders' understanding of new policies and practices (e.g., there are frequent opportunities for both central office and school personnel to learn about, discuss, and reflect on a new policy or practice). District leaders create regular opportunities to coach stakeholders on their implementation of new policies and practices (e.g., there are frequent opportunities to receive feedback on and observe the implementation of a new policy; there are frequent opportunities to plan with stakeholders and/or design pilots).

C. OPTIMIZE TEAM FUNCTIONING

Run efficient team meetings

Best Practice: Team meetings utilize practices that promote quality and efficient functioning (e.g., meetings have clear objectives; meetings involve facilitators, timekeepers, and/or other roles; meetings rely on team norms; meetings utilize protocols and agendas; etc.).

Create next steps and ensure accountability

Best Practice: Team meetings result in a list of clear, actionable next steps that include specific tasks, owners, and deadlines. There are visible norms and processes that ensure follow-up on next steps.

Create systems for collaboration

Best Practice: Teams have structures in place that promote frequent collaboration (e.g., regular meeting times; a document management system; cross-functional teams; etc.).

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QUESTIONS TO ASK ABOUT BUILDING CAPACITY

1. Do high-level leaders visibly support this change?
2. Is there an implementation team that understands their roles and feels accountable to each other?
3. Is the district's investment of people, money, and time sufficient?
4. Have leaders created meaningful opportunities to build stakeholder understanding of the change?
5. Does the implementation team have systems and procedures that promote accountability and project management?

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SET GOALS AND CREATE PLAN

Change is accomplished one step at a time.

A. ESTABLISH GOALS AND PRIORITIES

Establish and prioritize goals that promote urgency

Best Practice: District leaders establish desired outcomes and then prioritize (and de-prioritize) goals by considering impact and timing. In addition, district leaders track desired impact against outcomes to refine priorities throughout the process.

Identify connections to other district initiatives and goals

Best Practice: District leaders see where district initiatives may overlap or compete. Using broader district goals as a guide, they seek to resolve any conflicts between initiatives and leverage complementary efforts.

B. PLAN FOR IMPLEMENTATION

Create an implementation plan

Best Practice: Team has an implementation plan that outlines the what, who, when, and how of change (e.g., it focuses on how to achieve the vision; it explains how specific goals will be accomplished, by whom, and by when; it includes specific actions to be taken in order to implement initiatives; etc.). Team uses and updates the plan consistently to account for new opportunities or setbacks.

Ensure timeline is sufficient

Best Practice: When planning for implementation, district leaders balance feasibility with urgency using techniques like backwards mapping, using pilots or tests, and considering school year cycles.

Anticipate challenges, identify risks, and plan accordingly

Best Practice: District leaders anticipate common pitfalls, such as competing priorities, budget constraints, and stakeholder resistance and adjust accordingly (e.g., considering the timing of the launch relative to other initiatives; determining how much additional work will be required of stakeholders; understanding what resources or other scaffolding stakeholders will need to implement; understanding requisite behavior shifts; etc.).

Plan quick wins

Best Practice: District leaders consistently identify and plan for quick wins (efforts that are both high-impact and achievable).

QUESTIONS TO ASK ABOUT CREATING GOALS AND PLANNING FOR CHANGE

1. Do the goals promote urgency? Do they align clearly to the vision?
2. Are the goals prioritized based on impact and timing?
3. Has the implementation team identified where this work overlaps with other initiatives?
4. Does the team use a strong implementation plan to guide their work both short term and long-term?
5. Does the team use backwards mapping to ensure timelines are feasible?
6. Do leaders anticipate challenges and risks and plan accordingly?
7. Are quick wins identified in the implementation plan?

EXECUTE, REFLECT, AND IMPROVE

Every change requires continuous improvement.

A. ACHIEVE GOALS

Take action

Best Practice: District leaders avoid planning paralysis and execute on high-quality implementation plans with urgency and a sense of possibility. They take action but pause when they feel reflection, revision, or correction is/are necessary.

Stay on track

Best Practice: Teams meet their deadlines for tasks and milestones. They adjust timelines when obstacles or delays arise, or they adjust to incorporate new information.

Generate quick wins

Best Practice: District leaders achieve quick wins. They leverage these quick wins to create momentum for additional, often more challenging efforts down the road.

Achieve goals

Best Practice: Teams achieve their goals on time - or adjust their goals with evidence. Teams have a sense of accountability and expect consequences if goals are not met or changes are unexplained.

B. EXAMINE DATA

Monitor progress

Best Practice: District leaders have meaningful systems in place to measure the progress of the change (e.g., district leaders have tools for collecting data about initiative progress and have regular check-ins with stakeholders to ask about implementation).

Reflect and learn

Best Practice: District leaders consistently use progress monitoring data to reflect on implementation and to identify, define, and analyze problems and bright spots. District leaders identify and share learnings (e.g., with stakeholders, other district initiatives, etc.) of what is not working, what is working that can be replicated, and where outcomes are still to be determined.

C. CONTINUOUSLY IMPROVE

Improve strategies

Best Practice: District leaders use the reflection process to identify high return improvements that can be feasibly implemented and monitored. District leaders also stop doing what is not working.

Adjust implementation plan

Best Practice: District leaders incorporate new or revised strategies into the implementation plan, as needed. They ensure that a revised plan aligns with identified opportunities for improvement, the possible entry of new stakeholders, and new anticipated challenges or opportunities.

Institutionalize improvement

Best Practice: Ongoing cycles of continuous improvement become deeply ingrained in the district. Stakeholders rely heavily on this methodology to guide implementation work.

QUESTION TO ASK ABOUT EXECUTING, REFLECTING AND IMPROVING

1. Do leaders value both urgent action and thoughtful reflection?
2. Do leaders stay the course?
3. Do implementation teams stay on track?
4. Do leaders have systems in place to measure progress?
5. Do leaders regularly and transparently reflect on progress?
6. Do leaders make changes based on what they learn?

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