Using a Comprehensive Rubric to Evaluate Teacher/Leader School Transformation Capacity

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Abstract

Many current rubrics measuring school turnaround/transformation start from the premise that most existing staff will be replaced. This is an especially problematic assumption in our lowest-performing schools because it is very likely that new teachers and leaders will not be any more qualified than current staff. Partners in School Innovation developed a rubric designed to measure the school transformation capacity of existing teachers and leaders. Presenters will share lessons learned from developing and implementing the School Transformation Rubric (STR) in the low-performing urban schools the organization serves. It has been a valuable tool for evaluating program effectiveness. Attendees will be given a copy of the STR, as well as guidelines for developing comprehensive rubrics to measure school transformation capacity.

Introduction

The National Center for Education Statistics found that black and latino students scored lower than their white peers by an average of 20 test-score points on the National Assessment of Educational Progress math and reading assessments in grades 4 and 8 (NCES, 2009, 2011). A difference in 20 test-score points is the rough equivalent to 2 grade levels. This achievement gap by race is not only an illustration of the inequities in our national education system but also has severe implications for our future success as a country due to links between early education and adult standard of living. A study found that 3rd grade reading level is a strong predictor of high school graduation rate, and children who cannot read at grade level in 3rd grade are 3 times more likely to not graduate from high school (Hernandez, 2011). In turn, people 25 and over whom do not have a high school diploma will earn a median of $18,432 annually compared to those 25 and over who stops at a high school diploma and earn a median of $26,776 annually. With each consecutive degree, median earnings continue to rise, with a median of $31,906 for some college/Associate's degree, $47,510 for a bachelor's degree, and $62,313 for an advanced degree (U.S. Census Bureau, 2009). Due to the strong correlation between education and earnings, not closing the achievement gap will place the United States in a permanent recession (McKinsey & Company, 2009).

Since 2001, the Federal government has pressed for dramatic student achievement gains by holding schools accountable for test score performance. And since 2008, the federal government has budgeted over $3.5 billion to address this issue in the form of stimulus funding and School Improvement Grants. States are expected to use these monies to turn around low-performing schools using one of four models. *Transformation* requires a new school leader, but can be implemented with existing teachers. *Turnaround* occurs when both the leader and the majority of the teachers are removed from the campus. *Restart* places the school under the management of an external, often a charter, organization.

School closure is the final option that can be implemented with federal funds. The common denominator among the first 3 options is that existing principals will be replaced among our lowest performing schools. These principals are not necessarily out of a job. Due to the tenure structure in many school districts, people with more seniority can "bump" those with less seniority. Meaning someone who may have done a poor job at one school could continue to do a poor job at another school. The underlying causes of our achievement gap are not solved and we have a continuous cycle of low-performing public schools. A more sustainable solution is to build the capacity of school leaders and teachers to be more effective and create systems that support them to have as big an impact as possible on their students.

Partners in School Innovation is a San Francisco-based reform support organization founded in 1993. The organization's mission is to transform teaching and learning in the lowest-performing public schools so that every child, regardless of background, thrives in school. We believe that by building the capacity of existing staff at low-performing schools we provide a long-term solution for transforming these schools. Evidence from educational research and from our own years of practice indicates that schools must be strong in the following domains for school transformation to occur: results-oriented leadership, systems for professional learning, and a strong core instructional program.

Results-oriented leadership

Results-oriented leaders focus their efforts on creating a school environment where high-quality teaching and learning can occur. A results-oriented leadership approach is critical to transform schools and achieve extraordinary student learning results (Marzano, et al., 2005; Fullan, 2001; Elmore, 2000). Results-oriented leaders build the sense of ownership and the organizational capacity needed to sustain results. A strong results-orientation enables school leaders to focus on student outcomes and align the

school's resources, structures and policies to achieve those goals. They carry out daily actions that drive whole-school improvement efforts to raise the quality of teaching and learning.

One of the most powerful ways results-oriented leaders create a transformative school environment is through a culture of inquiry (Richardson, 2007; Wiggins & McTeague, 2005). Effective leaders develop a clear and compelling vision for school success and establish goals for student achievement and adult capacity. Once these goals are established and clearly communicated, results-oriented leaders create an action plan for achieving their targets. A system for monitoring the implementation of the action plan is also developed and student data are used to reflect on progress and adjust the plan as needed.

Systems for professional learning

Leaders in transforming schools develop and strengthen the systems that support teachers' professional learning to ensure sustained student achievement gains. A transforming school's leadership team should be responsible for setting school-wide goals for student achievement and adult capacity, monitoring the implementation of the school's action plan, and supporting teachers through the implementation process (Scheurich & Skrla, 2003). Professional learning structures enable adults to learn new content and skills and provide the opportunity for them to learn from each other. These structures must function as a tightly aligned system that enables teachers to develop a robust core instructional program, grow their practice, and deliver excellent instruction and thereby ensure high student achievement. This systemic approach fosters a culture of professional learning and continuous improvement.

Research on teacher professional learning has demonstrated that when teachers receive high-quality professional development and have regular opportunities to collaborate (both in grade levels and as a

whole staff) the quality and effectiveness of their instruction improves (Darling-Hammond & Richardson, 2009; Fullan, 2006; DuFour, 2004; Joyce & Showers, 2002). In addition to having protected and effective collaboration time, teachers must also be supported by capable instructional coaches. School leaders, instructional coaches, and teacher peers can most effectively assist teachers by helping them to articulate their vision for teaching and learning, to support them to learn the practices and skills needed to achieve that vision, and to examine multiple sources of student data to monitor and adjust their practice as needed (Bloom, et al., 2005; Marzano, et al., 2005)

Core instructional program

A strong core instructional program is at the heart of a transformed school. Teachers must learn to implement a rigorous curriculum, purposefully use assessments and data, engage in results-oriented planning, and strategically intervene when students may be behind. In addition, teachers should possess pedagogical practices designed to meet the learning needs of students of color (Goldenberg, 2008; Brown-Chidsey, 2007).

Teachers are the best resource a school has, since they have the most influence over student learning by virtue of the sheer amount of time they spend with students. Effective teaching can outweigh the heavy burden of poverty on student achievement: it far outweighs the effects of a student's previous achievement level, class size or the ethnic and socioeconomic makeup of a classroom (Sanders, et al., 1997). An effective teacher's influence is lasting and can be seen at least four years after a student has left the classroom (Rivers & Sanders, 1996).

However, teachers don't all have the same level of success in boosting student achievement. In a single year, the difference between an effective and an ineffective teacher can mean a full level of

achievement for a student (Hanushek, 1992). Even bigger differences—as many as 50 percentile points—show up when a student is taught by a series of high-quality versus low-quality teachers (Rivers & Sanders, 1996). If a poor child has a high-quality teacher for five years in a row, the effect of poverty on achievement can be eliminated (Rivkin, et al., 2001).

Driving the practice of the most effective teachers are three key elements: an understanding of how to strategically plan objective-driven lessons, an ability to deliver lessons effectively by adapting to student learning needs, and a commitment to reflection and constant improvement to further the opportunities of their students. On a practical level, teachers serve as coaches for students, providing direction when needed, offering clear instruction that is accessible to students of all learning modalities, and supporting students in bringing their best selves to the classroom. They bring an equity lens to their work, ensuring that all instruction is at an appropriate level of rigor and embodies culturally responsive practices. Through all their actions and strategic choices, the most effective teachers consistently communicate high expectations and infuse a genuine belief that all students - regardless of their economic, racial, cultural, and linguistic backgrounds - are able to excel.

PSI's Approach to Monitoring and Evaluation

Although there are currently many measures of school transformation capacity building (Learning Point Associates, 2010), most of them start from the assumption that staff will be or have been replaced. Partners in School Innovation (PSI) decided to create a review process that aligns with our approach to provide existing teachers and leaders with the tools and skills they need to not only dramatically improve student achievement, but also to sustain that transformation over time.

Partners in School Innovation's Theory of Change is simple. If we implement our research-based Approach with a high degree of fidelity, teachers and leaders will increase their capacity to transform their schools, which will lead to increased student achievement. When schools and districts are able to sustain their increased capacity, they will transform teaching and learning to create thriving students. To measure our Theory of Change, we currently use 3 primary tools: 1) the Program Implementation Checklist, 2) The School Transformation Rubric, and 3) state standardized test results. Our Program Implementation Checklist measures the degree to which our approach was implemented; our School Transformation Rubric measures the capacity that was built among school leaders and teachers; and finally results on state standardized tests tell us whether the percentage point of students scoring at grade level has increased or decreased while we partnered at a specific school.

Since we cannot make a causal link statistically between the implementation of our Approach and student achievement, measuring the capacity built at a school is a crucial stepping stone to understanding our impact. We developed our School Transformation Rubric (STR) to help us measure school capacity to engage in transformative practice both at the beginning of the year and the end of the year to look for areas of growth and areas of needed improvement.

The School Transformation Review and Rubric

The STR is organized around the three domains that ground our approach to school transformation: results-oriented leadership, systems for professional learning and core instructional program. Each domain of the STR contains several key capacity areas. These capacity areas are where PSI targets its work with schools. The capacity areas for each domain are below:

- Results-oriented Leadership
    - Vision
    - Plan

    - Act
    - Assess, reflect and adjust
- Systems for Professional Learning
    - Teacher collaboration
    - Instructional coaching
    - Professional development
- Core Instructional Program
    - Curriculum
    - Instruction
        - Learning environment
        - Effective lesson design
        - Differentiation
        - Student investment
        - Support for English Learners
    - Assessment

Within each capacity area lies a set of essential practices administrators and teachers need to incorporate into their ways of working to show improvement in that particular area. The broadly-defined instruction capacity area within the Core Instructional Program domain consists of five specific capacity sub-areas (learning environment, effective lesson design, differentiation, student investment and support for English Learners) and one additional essential practice (common practice). There are a total of 76 essential practices that make up the 2011-2012 STR. The table below displays the number of essential practices at both by domain and by capacity area.

School Transformation Rubric (STR)		**Essential Practices**
1	**Results-oriented Leadership**	**20**
1.1	Vision	4
1.2	Plan	3
1.3	Act	9
1.4	Assess, reflect and adjust	4
2	**Systems for Professional Learning**	**22**
2.1	Teacher collaboration	9
2.2	Instructional coaching	8
2.3	Professional development	5
3	**Core Instructional Program**	**34**
3.1	Curriculum	6
3.2	Instruction	22
3.2.02-05	Learning environment	(4)

3.2.06-10	Effective lesson design	(5)
3.2.11-14	Differentiation	(4)
3.2.15-19	Student investment	(5)
3.2.20-22	Support for English Learners	(3)
3.3	Assessment	6
	Total Essential Practices	**76**

The STR denotes school transformation in six stages, indicating the extent of implementation of each essential practice. The stages of each essential practice in a capacity area are averaged to determine the capacity built in that particular capacity area. The table below shows descriptions of each stage of transformation. Capacity growth is measured by the movement from one stage of implementation to the next at the essential practice level. For example, movement from stage two to stage three is equal to one band movement; movement from stage one to stage three is equal to two band movements, etc. In the first stage, there is no evidence that an essential practice is being implemented anywhere in the school. At stage six, the essential practice is being systematically and consistently implemented by the school community and that implementation would be continued even after our engagement with the school ends.

Stage	Stage Description
1	**No evidence.** Essential practice is not implemented (0% implementation) or not true.
2	**Readiness.** Implementation of essential practice is rare and sporadic (1-25% implementation) or minimally/infrequently true.
3	**Emerging.** Implementation of essential practice is occurring in some areas, but is neither systematic, nor consistent (26-50% implementation) or partially/sometimes true.
4	**Implementing.** Implementation of essential practice is systematic, but is not consistent (51-75% implementation) or partially/often true.
5	**Transforming.** Implementation of essential practice is systematic and consistent (76-100% implementation) or mostly/almost always true.
6	**Sustaining.** Implementation of essential practice is systematic and consistent (76-100% implementation) or mostly/almost always true. In addition, there are policies, structures and cultural conditions in place to sustain the essential practice.

An example of what would be seen at each stage is below:

- Stage 1: No Evidence-At Stage 1, there is no evidence that the practice is being implemented anywhere in the school. The school's leaders and teachers may express the need for the particular practice to be implemented, but the school is putting forth no effort related to actually implementing the practice. There is no action occurring. For example, a school would receive a 1 for tracking progress of student goals if no student data tracking was observed in any classroom. Even if teachers and leaders indicated that this was important to them, there is no actual behavior linked to tracking progress of student goals.
- Stage 2: Readiness-At Stage 2, there is movement toward implementing the practice, but the effort is minimal. It could mean that there are a handful of teachers, either in one grade level or spread out over several grade levels, are implementing the practice, but that there is no system in place for a more widespread adoption of the practice. For example, a school would score a 2 on culturally relevant materials if they were observed being used by teachers in only 1 grade level.
- Stage 3: Emerging-At Stage 3, the practice is starting to take hold at the school. Leaders are increasing their use of the practice. Teachers in several grade levels are implementing the practice. However, the process of implementation could be just beginning or it could be incomplete. For example, a school would receive a 3 in setting student achievement goals if leaders articulated clearly defined, measurable, and accelerated school wide goals, but did not establish them for subgroups.
- Stage 4: Implementing-At Stage 4, there is evidence that there is a system in place to promote the implementation of the practice. Leaders engage in it regularly or it can be seen across most grade levels. For example, a school would receive a 4 in peer coaching if all teachers in half of

the grade levels regularly engaged in peer coaching practices (e.g., sharing best practices, engaging in lesson study, observing one another in the classroom).

- Stage 5: Transforming-At Stage 5, there is evidence that there is a system in place to promote the implementation of the practice and most of the school's leaders and teachers are regularly implementing it. At this stage, the practice has become part of the fabric of the school. For example, a school would score a 5 in use of disaggregated data if most school leaders and teachers consistently looked for patterns of achievement by race, culture, and language status. Disaggregated data were analyzed at every meeting concerning student achievement data.
- Stage 6: Sustaining-At Stage 6, there is evidence that the practice would be systematically and consistently implemented at a school regardless of PSI's presence. The school maintains the necessary systems. For example, a school would receive a 6 in time for collaboration if all grade levels were given regular time to collaborate and that school leaders continued this practice independent of their partnership with PSI.

To determine if a school's capacity has been built, a school transformation review is conducted each spring. The school transformation review process gathers data from four sources: field staff assessment of the school's capacity, evidence gathered from classroom observations, teacher focus groups, and an interview with school leadership. A team of three to four PSI staff members interpret all data sources to score each essential practice. Then a triangulation process occurs where a neutral staff person facilitates a discussion to decide on the final scores for each essential practice at each school. We also conduct school transformation reviews in the fall for schools that are new to partnering with PSI and for returning schools that have had significant staff turnover from the previous school year.

Evolution of the School Transformation Rubric

The School Transformation Rubric was designed during the 2008-2009 school year and was piloted during the 2009-2010 school year. It was developed together with our School Transformation Framework and has seen multiple iterations over the last 4 years in an attempt to create a stronger and more useful tool for multiple stakeholders. The rubric has evolved in 4 main ways since 2008:

1. Before the development of the School Transformation Framework field staff felt that their daily activities were not well-aligned or leading to a common goal across the organization. The framework was created and then the rubric as a way to provide step-by-step processes to follow the framework. Now the framework and the rubric together provide a clear process for staff and also for strategic planning among program teams. The ability to follow a framework and measure our process will be crucial as we expand our work to other states to determine if our approach to education reform is replicable.
2. The rubric was also developed to provide a link between our activities and our long term impact on student achievement. In 2008, the only measure of success was student achievement on standardized tests. Field staff felt there was an unclear link between their everyday activities and the testing results. The rubric now serves as an outcome monitoring tool to measure changes in adult capacity. It allowed us to complete our Theory of Action which links implementation of our approach to growth in adult capacity to higher than average student achievement. In the future, we plan to develop an even more comprehensive Impact Measurement System that builds upon our current Theory of Action.
3. Originally the rubric was purely qualitative and contained a series of vignettes illustrating various levels of school transformation. The vignettes were very useful to school staff to help them understand where they were in reform efforts; however, they were not as useful in terms

of measuring organizational effectiveness. The rubric scoring mechanism was revised to provide a more precise measurement that could be used as an outcome monitoring tool on a larger scale. The 1-6 scale was added to the series of vignettes, which were then broken down into separate line items of "essential practices." The tool is currently a mixed methods tool given that the data collection processes entail interviews, focus groups, and checklists. Further, the scale on the rubric itself contains quantitative scores and qualitative scores. In the future we hope to train staff to have better calibration around the quantitative portion of the tool, so that a 3 or a 4 means the same to everyone providing scores, regardless of which school they partnered with.

4. Given that the tool has seen so many iterations over the last 4 years, it has been difficult to compare or look at growth longitudinally. The schools that do have longitudinal data are so few in number that the sample size prohibits the way data can be analyzed. However, the last 2 years have seen a stabilization of the instrument to the extent that we can now conduct paired t-tests to look at whether growth in adult capacity is statistically significant form year to year. In the future, as we collect additional years of data, we hope to be able to conduct more sophisticated longitudinal analyses, calculate inter-rater reliability, and conduct a factor analysis to see if our current categorizations are accurate and most useful.

Lessons Learned

Throughout the development and evolution of the school transformation rubric, we have taken away five chief lessons:

1. We attribute the usefulness of the tool to the fact that it was developed in unison with and is clearly linked to our organization's Theory of Change, our framework, and our field staff members' daily activities.
2. We also feel it is important and improves utilization and buy-in if the tool is grounded in research and practice. Not only is the tool grounded in educational research findings but there has been extensive input from our field staff members who are all previous educators or school leaders. We feel this is especially important given that our organization has been in existence for nearly 20 years and it is invaluable to include staff experiences in the development of all organizational tools and theories.
3. Our tool is strong because it is used by all stakeholders involved – from the Board down to the schools' principals. The fact that the tool is a mixed-methods tool helps improve usefulness for multiple audiences because the data can become meaningful in different ways for different people. For example, school staff may appreciate the stories behind the numeric scores to help them see specific examples of where they can improve. Whereas our leaders, evaluators, and program managers may appreciate the numeric scores as indicators of performance or effectiveness.
4. Our next lesson is closely related to #3 in that the rubric also serves multiple purposes and functions. Our rubric is used organizationally as an outcome monitoring tool; it is used by field staff for planning school strategies; and it is used by school staff as an assessment tool. Also, on

an organizational level, the content in the rubric guides our professional networks and learning systems throughout the year.

5. Lastly, it is absolutely necessary to take the time to improve the tool in collaboration with multiple stakeholders even if it means that variables change year to year. Although our tool was developed in 2008, it has not been stable until 2012. Now we know that we have a strong, relevant, and useful tool we can begin to plan for tool validation. This will be especially crucial as we scale the organization to additional sites and need to replicate our approach nationwide.

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