###

Continuous Improvement Planning

Session 1: Preparing to Plan

Handouts

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# **Handout 1** | Session Overview

## Session Goals

* Define continuous improvement planning and explain its role in an adult education program
* Begin the pre-planning process

## Learning Objectives

* Name the stages in a continuous improvement planning cycle
* Identify key steps in preparing to plan
* Complete the pre-planning questionnaire
* Identify potential pitfalls and strategies for pre-planning

## Pre-Work

* Read [Performance Accountability: For What? To Whom? And How?](https://www.sabes.org/content/planning-continuous-improvement-resources) (Merrifield, 1999)
* Familiarize yourself with the following:
	+ [FY24-FY28 Massachusetts Policies for Effective Adult Education in Community Adult Learning Centers and Correctional Institutions](https://www.doe.mass.edu/acls/abeprogram/default.html)
	+ [Indicators of Program Quality](https://www.doe.mass.edu/acls/accountability/program-quality/)
	+ [Program Quality Review and Site Visit Protocol](https://www.doe.mass.edu/acls/accountability/program-quality/reviews.html)

Homework

* Complete Steps 1-4 of the Preparing to Plan Questionnaire or make a plan for how you will do this
* Find 3 data elements to bring to the next session, including one from LACES/Desk Review and one not from LACES/Desk Review
* Check in with an accountability partner at least once before Session 2 to ask about progress on the homework

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# **Handout 2** | The SABES Continuous Improvement Planning Cycle



# **Handout 3** | The SABES Continuous Improvement Planning Template

Program Name:

Fiscal Year/s: From to

|  |
| --- |
| Goal:Reason for choosing this goal: |

IPQ (Check one or more)

|  |  |
| --- | --- |
| 1: Program Design | 6: Student Progress |
| 2: Equitable Access | 7: Advising and Student Support Services |
| 3: Career Pathways Collaboration | 8: Organizational Support |
| 4: Curriculum  | 9: Educational Leadership |
| 5: Instruction and Assessment | 10: Fiscal and Data Accountability |

Reason for choosing this/these IPQ/s:

Indicators of Success:

*
*

**Objective 1:**

Benchmarks:

|  |  |  |  |  |
| --- | --- | --- | --- | --- |
| **Activity** | **Who** | **Timeline** | **Resources/PD** | **Progress Report** |
|  |  |  |  |  |
|  |  |  |  |  |
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**Objective 2:**

Benchmarks:

|  |  |  |  |  |
| --- | --- | --- | --- | --- |
| **Activity** | **Who** | **Timeline** | **Resources/PD** | **Progress Report** |
|  |  |  |  |  |
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**Action Plan Checklist**

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| --- | --- |
|  | The goal is aligned with vision, values, and priorities. |
|  | The goal will be achieved if the objectives are achieved. |
|  | The activities include all major steps to reach the objective. |
|  | The activities are in a logical sequence. |
|  | The indicator matches the goal. |
|  | The benchmarks are measurable or observable. |
|  | The timeline is realistic. |
|  | A specific person or small group is responsible for each activity. |
|  | The plan includes opportunities for reflection and adjustment. |

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# **Handout 4** | Reading: “Change Theory: A Force for School Improvement”

From “Change theory: A force for school improvement” by Michael Fullan. See Session References for full citation.

**Activity Instructions**

1. Divide the premises among your group members.
2. Read your section. Prepare to summarize and share your understanding with your group.
3. Group members report out.
4. Discuss and prepare to share out.

**Group Discussion Questions:**

* How do these premises apply in your context?
* Which resonate with you?
* What would you add?

**Group Notes:**

|  |
| --- |
| **Premise 1 | Focus on motivation**If you take any hundred or so books on change, the message all boils down to one word: motivation. If one’s theory of action does not motivate people to put in the effort – individually and collectively – that is necessary to get results, improvement is not possible. Let me make two points:1. The other six core premises are all about motivation and engagement – ie, they are about accomplishing the first premise.
2. As we shall see, motivation cannot be achieved in the short run. In fact the beginning of all eventual successes is unavoidably bumpy. However, if your strategy does not gain on the motivation question over time (eg, end of year one, year two etc) it will fail.

Certainly moral purpose is a great potential motivator, but by itself won’t go anywhere, unless other conditions conspire to mobilize several key aspects of motivation, including* moral purpose;
* capacity;
* resources;
* peer and leadership support;
* identity and so on.

It is the combination that makes the motivational difference. |
| **Notes** |

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| **Premise 2 | Capacity-building, with a focus on results**Capacity building, with a focus on results, is crucial. Here is an example of where our theory of action became more refined over time. Around 1995 we coined the phrase that for large-scale reform we need a combination of ‘pressure and support’. This was on the right track, but not precise enough. For one thing many policy makers overdosed on the side of pressure. When they did attend to support, it was segmented from pressure and was not specific enough to have an impact. Now the integrated phrase of ‘capacity building, with a focus on results’ captures both aspects well.Capacity building is defined as any strategy that increases the collective effectiveness of a group to raise the bar and close the gap of student learning. For us it involves helping to develop individual and collective * knowledge and competencies;
* resources; and
* motivation.

These capacities are specifically about getting results (raise the bar, close the gap). Our theory of action says that nothing will count unless people develop new capacities. And, indeed, that new capacities are a route to motivation (as I said, all our premises contribute to increased motivation). Most theories of change are weak on capacity building and that is one of the key reasons why they fall short. As Elmore (2004) advised, no external accountability scheme can be successful in the absence of internal accountability – in fact, the latter is none other than capacity building with a focus on results. A key part of the focus on results is what I call the evolution of positive pressure. An emphasis on accountability by itself produces negative pressure: pressure that doesn’t motivate and that doesn’t get to capacity building. Positive pressure is pressure that does motivate, that is palpably fair and reasonable and does come accompanied by resources for capacity building. The more one invests in capacity building, the more one has the right to expect greater performance. The more one focuses on results fairly – comparing like schools, using data over multiple years, providing targeted support for improvement – the more that motivational leverage can be used. In our change theory, it is capacity building first and judgement second, because that is what is most motivational. |
| **Notes** |

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| **Premise 3 | Learning in context**The third basic premise is that strategies for reform must build in many opportunities for ‘learning in context’. In fact, creating cultures where learning in context is endemic is the point. Again Elmore (2004) has pinpointed the issue: Improvement is more a function of *learning to do the right things in the settings where you work’* (p 73) the italics indicating his emphasis for ‘learning to do the right things’; mine for ‘in the settings where you work’. He goes on to say The problem [is that] there is almost no opportunity for teachers to engage in continuous and sustained learning about their practice in the settings in which they actually work, observing and being observed by their colleagues in their own classrooms and classrooms of other teachers in other schools confronting similar problems. He then puts forward the positive implication (it is no accident that he uses the exact phrase – ‘theory of action’): The theory of action behind [this process of examining practice] might be stated as follows: The development of systematic knowledge about, and related to, large-scale instructional improvement requires a change in the prevailing culture of administration and teaching in schools. Cultures do not change by mandate; they change by the specific displacement of existing norms, structures, and processes by others; the process of cultural change depends fundamentally on modeling the new values and behavior that you expect to displace the existing ones (p 11).In this way learning in context actually changes the very context itself. Contexts do improve. |
| **Notes** |

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| **Premise 4 | A bias for reflective action**For the previous four components to move forward in concert, they must be fueled by a bias for reflective action. Here our change knowledge is quite specific, and any leader must know this. There are several aspects to the reflective action premise. First, shared vision and ownership is more an outcome of a quality process than it is a precondition. This is important to know because it causes one to act differently in order to create ownership. Second, and related, behaviour changes to a certain extent before beliefs. Again there are do-and-don’t change actions that derive from this knowledge, such as our third aspect, which is that the size and prettiness of the planning document is inversely related to the amount and quality of action, and in turn to the impact on student learning (Reeves, 2006). Pfeffer and Sutton (2000) emphasise our action theme in their book about the knowing–doing gap book – for example with the first barrier that they identify: when planning substitutes for action. We need to dig a bit deeper to understand the theory of action underpinning the bias for reflective action. The reflection part is crucial. This goes back to Dewey, who offered the insight that it is not that we learn by doing but that we learn by thinking about what we are doing. It is the purposeful thinking part that counts, not the mere doing. Mintzberg (2004) makes the same point when he says we need programs designed to educate practicing managers in context; [such leadership] has to be learned, not just by doing it but by being able to gain conceptual insight while doing it’ (p 200). All the current emphasis about evidence-based and evidence-informed leadership is based on this same premise (Pfeffer and Sutton, 2006). People learn best through doing, reflection, inquiry, evidence, more doing and so on. |
| **Notes** |

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| **Premise 5 | Persistence and flexibility in staying the course**Lastly, because the above six premises are complex to manage and must be cultivated over time, including bumpy cycles, a strong resolve is necessary to stay the course. It takes what I would call resilience – persistence plus flexibility. Rigid persistence begets pushback in equal or greater measure. Failure to keep going in the face of inevitable barriers achieves nothing. Being flexible, in fact, is built into the action theory. Because the theory is reflective and inquiry-based, and because it is cultivated in the minds and actions of key players operating with a similar theory of action (the seven premises), there is plenty of self-correction and refinement built-in. In the seven premises of change knowledge I have attempted to capture the underlying thinking of effective change strategies – the theory of action if you like. It is essential to understand this thinking deeply, rather than just knowing the concrete strategies. If you do understand the thinking you spontaneously get the strategies right, and self-correct as you experience them unfolding. If you don’t understand the thinking you are more likely to use even the best strategies (such as capacity building) superficially or in a piecemeal fashion. We can now put some meat on the theory of action by referring to two examples of how they translate into a specific set of strategies in concrete situations (see Fullan, Hill and Crevola, 2006, and Fullan, 2006 for more elaboration on these and other examples). The first example refers to district-wide reform in a large urban district; the second to a statewide reform. |
| **Notes** |

# **Handout 5** | Preparing to Plan Questionnaire

## 1 | Define the Scope and Timeframe

* Who decides the scope?
* What context and guardrails exist?
* What scope of work might be manageable and most meaningful?
* What time frame will the plan cover?

## 2 | Decide on the Process and Structure

* What do you expect to be essential skills and perspectives for this planning process? How will you ensure that you have adequate representation on the team to represent the needed depth and breadth?
* What process will you use to select people (volunteer, appoint, apply) so you have legitimacy of process and the right skills?
* Who from your program should be involved? How will you include part-time staff, if applicable? What role will students play and how will you foster that participation?
* Given what you know about your community, partnerships, and governing board, who should be invited to the table? (These can be people who help envision the process as well as those who might become more involved throughout the process.)
* What is the level of involvement for each person who will contribute to the process? How much time do you anticipate each person on your core planning team will need to commit to this process? Can you provide multiple levels of engagement?
* What will the body look like? Will you meet in one large group or have subcommittees? Will the nature of the group be decision-making or advisory? How will decisions be made?
* What budget do you estimate for this process? (Include team PD, planning, meeting, and individual work time; travel for PD; supplies, and other relevant costs.)
* Where will the funds for this budget come from? Will these resources be adequate?
* What institutional support or permissions will you need?

## 3 | Identify Data Sources

* What questions do you have that need data to answer?
* What sources do you already have?
* What more would you likely need to know? Where can you get that information?
* How can you include students in gathering and making meaning of data?

## 4 | Plan for Communication

* How will you introduce the planning process to students, staff, and partners?
* Who will receive updates? How frequently? How much detail will you include?
* Where and how will you seek input or feedback from those not involved in the planning committee?

## 5 | Select Team Members/Partners

* Using the process outlined in step two, select members for your team.

## 5 | Convene and Orient the Team

* What context is needed to prepare everyone to be part of the process? (And what context is *not* needed?) What specific skills or training are needed?
* What key shared knowledge and information is needed by all team members?
* What are the roles, responsibilities, and expectations for planning team members?
* If students are involved, how can you prepare everyone and structure the group so that they can participate confidently and on equal footing?
* Who will conduct the orientation?
* What is the overarching schedule (e.g., PD dates, common meeting times, check-in points, deadlines)?

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# **Handout 6** | Pre-Planning Pitfalls and Strategies

The following pitfalls have been gathered from programs over the years. We will add strategies together during our conversation.

|  |  |  |  |
| --- | --- | --- | --- |
| **Step** | **Rationale** | **Pitfalls** | **Strategies** |
| Define the Scope | Clarity about what is feasible, timeline, expectations, and boundaries will establish guidelines for the process.  | * The scope is too ambitious or unrealistic
* Or…it’s too weak—it has no possibility of actually leading to meaningful change
* The scope is not specific, clear, or transparent to all
* It does not consider other perspectives or priorities
 |  |
| Set Process and Structure | Clarity about the process and structure will ensure that you get the right people on your team and transparency will help them to stay. | * Lack of interest to volunteer or serve on the team if it doesn’t have decision-making authority.
* Process isn’t authentic (looks like it’s inclusive but actually is not)
 |  |
| Identify Data Sources | An effective planning process should be based on what we “know” (because it’s based on evidence), not on what we “suspect” (because we’ve made assumptions). | * Lack of awareness of where to find relevant and valid data.
* Lack of staff who are comfortable and have time to explore, compile, and analyze data.
 |  |
| Select Team Members/ Partners | An effective planning process benefits from multiple perspectives from people who are committed and engaged. They need and deserve to understand their role, responsibilities, and commitment. | * Deciding who can (availability) and should (expertise) be part of the team.
* Politics about who “must” be part of the team, even if they don’t necessarily have time or expertise that is beneficial.
* Logistics: Good people are always busy. When, where, and how to coordinate meetings can be challenging.
* Need to build community and trust
 |  |
| Plan for Communication | A clear and intentional plan for communicating with stakeholders outside of the core committee promotes transparency and allows for more engagement and feedback. | * Students or stakeholders tune out because they don’t have context or because they’re receiving too much information.
* Community input is weak.
* or, conversely, there is more feedback than the core committee can address.
 |  |
| Provide Orientation and Training to Planning Team | A smooth planning process begins by making sure that everyone is one the same page and fully understands the scope, their roles, and the process. | * Logistics
* Lack of time, interest
* Lack of resources
 |  |

# **Handout 7** | Data Sources

## Common Data Sources for Planning

* Surveys
* Interviews: individual and focus groups
* City and town websites
* Community and partner meetings
* Classroom observations
* Artifacts (e.g., student work, teacher lesson plans)
* Desk reviews, LACES, and NRS reports
* Census data
* Budgets
* Local Workforce Development Board plans
* Students

## Data Sources Aligned to IPQs

|  |  |
| --- | --- |
| City and town websitesCensus data  | Indicators 1 and 2 |
| Surveys Interviews and focus groups | Indicators 1, 2, 7, 8, and 9 |
| Desk Reviews, LACES, and NRS Reports | Indicators 1, 5, 6, and 10 |
| Community and partner meetings Local Workforce Development Board plans | Indicators 2 and 3 |
| Classroom observations | Indicators 4, 5, and 9 |
| Artifacts  | Indicators 4, 5, and 6 |
| Budgets | Indicator 10 |

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# **Handout 8** | Session 1 References

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