

11. PUT IT ALL TOGETHER

Establish Routines To Monitor Performance and Solve Problems

Part of **IMPLEMENTING
Common Core**
State Standards and Assessments

A Workbook for State and District Leaders

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11. Put It All Together:

Establish Routines To Monitor Performance and Solve Problems

Diagnostic questions to guide your team's reading of this chapter:

- Does the system have set routines to track progress against your aspiration? Do these routines identify the actions needed to stay on track or get back on track?
- Does analysis uncover key issues, anticipate problems and prioritize them for resolution? Do you have processes in place to solve problems quickly and effectively?
- Do you have a plan for sustaining a consistent focus on the transition to the Common Core State Standards?

Establish Routines

Implementation does not end once good planning is complete. The key to driving and monitoring performance lies in establishing set **routines**. Today's state education agencies and school districts face multiple barriers to successful implementation; the greatest risk is that crises and fires will distract leaders at all levels from the core work of implementing the new standards. Routines are regularly scheduled checkpoints that help the system leader and strategic implementation team review performance, discuss major issues and jointly identify solutions to drive implementation forward. Put differently, routines force leaders to regularly check progress on a consistent set of priorities. Routines can take multiple forms — a face-to-face discussion, a brief written note or even a more in-depth report — but at their essence, all of them are dialogues about performance.

The principle of a routine is, of course, not unfamiliar to most state education agencies or districts. Examples of current routines are senior staff meetings, all-hands staff meetings and project management processes like a Project Management Oversight Committee. The one major difference between a regular interaction such as this and a delivery routine is the focus: **A delivery routine will consistently return participants to questions of whether they are on track to achieve the results that they have promised.** When properly designed, routines can be a source of structure and discipline for Common Core State Standards (CCSS) implementation efforts.

A few simple steps will allow a system to build a set of routines that fulfill this purpose. The first step is to clearly establish **what is being monitored**. This means deciding the level at which you will be doing the review, which can range from overall implementation of the new CCSS to a tighter focus on key projects like introducing model curricula and aligned instructional materials. Local school districts are also an important unit of analysis; a state department could seek regular feedback from regional staff or district superintendents on the progress being made in key districts. For states that already have significant delivery efforts under way, the overall implementation of the CCSS should fall under one or more of your overall delivery goals for student outcomes — which means that the level of review will be even more broad. There is no single right answer; you should choose a level of review that makes the most sense for your system to regularly assess the most important areas of implementation.

You must also establish **what data and information will be reviewed**. The success measures that you identified are a good starting point to answer this question. They include outcome metrics, intermediate metrics and process

milestones. The more outcome oriented a metric is likely to be, the less frequently available it usually is. This should not stop you from regularly reviewing progress using more process oriented — but more frequently available — measures of success. Because of the hard work you have done to create trajectories, you have explicitly drawn the connection between these process metrics and your expected impact on the overall outcome. When you lack outcome data, the relevant questions are: Given what I know about progress on the relevant activities, are we on track to achieve our desired results? What is the likelihood that we will deliver?

Once you have identified the data and information that you want to review, certain tactical questions then become important. Who will ensure that the data are collected? What will the process look like? How will you avoid duplication of effort? Answering these questions is important, both to preserve staff resources and to ensure that your work is not seen as more of a burden than it must be.


CASE STORY: PARTNERSHIP FOR ASSESSMENT OF READINESS FOR COLLEGE AND CAREERS (PARCC) STATE

In one PARCC state, the CCSS implementation effort is set in the broader context of a goal to improve 3rd grade literacy. Adopting the CCSS, creating model curricula and launching professional development on these curricula are three of about a dozen projects that are meant to contribute to this goal.

To track progress, the state has developed a feedback loop consisting of a range of evidence:

- It has defined a student outcome goal of increasing the number of students who score proficient on the 3rd grade reading assessment by around 14,000 by the 2014–15 school year.
- It has defined several leading indicators. (One related to CCSS implementation, for example, is the retention rate of teachers with fewer than five years of service in grades K–3.)
- It has created a project charter with milestones and deliverables for each of the projects, with an explicit estimate of the contribution that successful completion of each project will make toward the student outcome goal.

The strategic implementation team wants to regularly review progress — and the likelihood that its goals would be delivered — in a systematic and regular way. To do this, it instituted a quarterly review meeting that includes the senior official responsible for the goal, the commissioner and related project leaders. The challenge is to ensure a consistent discussion at each meeting, despite the fact that much of the data from the aforementioned feedback loops are infrequently or irregularly available.

To solve this problem, the team relied on an **assessment framework** — a qualitative rubric that asks several rigorous questions about each component of the plan to determine the likelihood that the component will contribute its share to the desired outcome. The qualitative judgments are combined with what data are available to render an overall judgment:  (**on track**),  (**mixed**),  (**problematic**) and  (**highly problematic**).

Assessment Framework To Evaluate and Compare Progress at Any Level (EXAMPLE)

Judgment	Rating	Rationale summary
Degree of challenge	L/M/H/VH	
Quality of planning, implementation and performance management		
Capacity to drive progress		
Stage of delivery	1/2/3/4	

Data on outcomes,
leading indicators
and milestones

Likelihood of
delivery



KEY

L — Low
M — Medium
H — High
VH — Very High

- Highly problematic — requires urgent and decisive action
- Problematic — requires substantial attention, some aspects need urgent attention
- Mixed — aspect(s) require substantial attention, some good
- Good — requires refinement and systematic implementation

This framework can be applied at any level — the outcome itself (what is the likelihood that the target outcome will be delivered?) or a component project (what is the likelihood that the project will deliver its estimated contribution to the outcome goal?). This second view is illustrated in the figure on the next page.




Interim Assessment of Progress for One Strategy in 3rd Grade Reading Goal (EXAMPLE)

Leading indicators for a strategy

#	Strategy	Leading indicator	Q1 2010–11
2	Ensure prekindergarten–grade 3 teachers statewide receive consistent professional development related to curriculum standards.	Retention of teachers with fewer than five years of service, grades PK–3	87.8%

+

Qualitative judgments of the likelihood that each of the strategy's projects will deliver the promised impact on the goal

Projects	Judgment	Rationale
CCSS professional development		Plan relies on train-the-trainer model, needs support component
Communicate content of professional development offerings		Project charter not developed
Curriculum map and pacing guide		Not aligned to CCSS

A quarterly data set that can serve as the evidence base for a performance conversation about the strategy

KEY



Highly problematic — requires urgent and decisive action

Problematic — requires substantial attention, some aspects need urgent attention

Mixed — aspect(s) require substantial attention, some good

Good — requires refinement and systematic implementation

These data allow the department to have regular conversations about whether their activities are having the expected impact. By applying a similar type of routine and assessment framework to the projects in a CCSS implementation effort, you can establish a monitoring system that will help drive results.

Finally, keep in mind several important design principles when establishing routines. First, repurpose existing meetings where possible. The weekly leadership team meeting, for example, can be used to also review CCSS implementation once a month. Second, use existing project management practices to inform delivery routines. Where routines are already in place to review whether projects are on track, the strategic implementation team can also examine data from this process to better understand the impact of this work on teacher behavior and student outcomes. Third, there should be no surprises. The purpose of the routine is not a “gotcha” but rather a chance for the system leader and staff to remove implementation barriers and problem solve. And fourth, use routines to review progress but push for next steps. When done properly, the routine can serve as an effective forcing mechanism to create interim deadlines for action.

EXERCISE: ESTABLISH ROUTINES TO DRIVE AND MONITOR PERFORMANCE

Purpose: To create a plan for regular routines that will allow your team to monitor implementation progress, problem solve and continually drive your implementation forward.

Who should participate? The strategic implementation team should complete this exercise, with the input and approval of your state chief.

Directions:

1. Think through the routines you already have in place, how they might be changed and which routines you will need to establish.
2. Complete the template below outlining the participants, frequency, form (written notes, in-person meeting, etc.) and data to be reviewed at each routine.
3. Review your list to ensure that your routines will provide the right people with the right information at the right time.

	Participants	Frequency	Form	Data to be reviewed
Routine 1:				
Routine 2:				
Routine 3:				
Routine 4:				
Routine 5:				

Solve Problems

Unforeseen problems inevitably arise as plans are made and implementation begins. System leaders and staff need to have a process that can identify and address these problems according to their urgency and severity.

The first step is to ensure that the system is **regularly receiving the information that is needed to identify problems as they arise**. Mechanisms for this include routines for monitoring progress (see previous pages) and feedback loops for information from the field. In addition, instituting a regular “pulse check” with key audiences — both internal and external — may help you spot and deal with emerging issues before they escalate.

The second step is to create the process for **choosing which problems to deal with, in what order and with what level of resources**. Many systems miss this step: The nature of a public agency is such that there are always more problems to be solved than there is capacity to solve them. Lacking the means to address all problems, systems often become firefighters, dealing with problems in the order in which they arise and not necessarily in order of importance.

A system’s approach to problem-solving should be similar to medical triage: As problems arise, prioritize them according to severity and/or complexity and assign staff resources to them accordingly. Each “category” in this system should define criteria for inclusion in it (e.g., How severe is the problem? How difficult is it to solve? How urgent?), as well as guidelines for appropriate assignment of staff resources (e.g., “ignore for now,” “delegate to junior staff to handle,” “solve as a team,” “dedicate a portion of system leader’s personal time to resolving”).

Problem-Solving as a “Triage” Process: Determining How Seriously the Problem Is Affecting the Work (EXAMPLE)

Level	Characteristics of problem	Potential actions for strategic implementation team
1: Gentle reminder	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> The work is somewhat off track Cause and solution are relatively clear 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> Personally contact individual accountable for relevant aspect of the work (e.g., phone call, e-mail) Offer support, but ask individual to fix the problem Follow up to ensure problem has been resolved
2: Standard problem-solving	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> Problem is significantly affecting the work Cause and solution are not obvious 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> Designate members of your strategic implementation team responsible for “co-owning” the problem with the relevant official Conduct collaborative problem-solving Get additional attention from chief; develop more frequent and deeper routines
3: Intensive problem-solving	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> Problem is severely affecting the work Cause and solution have significant complexity 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> Designate special problem-solving team Conduct quick fieldwork for deeper problem-solving Develop temporary new routines for reporting progress (e.g., weekly)
4: Crisis management	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> Problem is among the top one or two problems of the system and is completely impairing the work 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> Involve strategic implementation team leader full time in problem-solving Request active and frequent participation of chief Use system’s crisis management techniques (e.g., specialized teams with outside experts, public relations blitz, etc.)

Assigning problems into these categories needs to be an explicit and regular discussion within the strategic implementation team. For this reason, someone on the strategic implementation team should lead that discussion to help the team agree on where to focus time and energy.

The third step is to equip everyone in the system with **the tools and mindsets to address issues as they arise**. Lower-level problems can be resolved by mid-level and junior staff only if those staff feel empowered to act. In some cases, this means sending a clear message that such behavior is not only allowed but also encouraged. Communicating about the triage system — and its implications for mid-level and junior staff — is one helpful way to do this. In other cases, capacity-building will be necessary. A variety of simple tools can be used to coach staff in new problem-solving behaviors. **You can learn more about problem solving [here](#).**

Similar Problem-Solving Approach for Staff in Your Department (EXAMPLE)

Level	Characteristics of problem	Desired staff mindset
1: Gentle reminder	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> The work is somewhat off track Cause and solution are relatively clear 	"I will take responsibility to solve the problem myself and inform my team/supervisor of my work."
2: Standard problem-solving	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> Problem is significantly affecting the work Cause and solution are not obvious 	"I will try to understand the problem more deeply for myself. I will not take it to my team/supervisor until I have a proposed solution and have isolated the most difficult and critical questions."
3: Intensive problem-solving	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> Problem is severely affecting the work Cause and solution have significant complexity 	"I will actively involve my team/supervisor to solve the problem and create formal mechanisms/venues to do so."
4: Crisis management	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> Problem is among the top one or two problems of the system and is completely impairing the work 	"I will work with my team/supervisor to support the system leader in crisis management."

Two sets of tools will be useful for higher-level problems that demand more joint leadership attention. **Investigative tools** allow you to break down complex issues to discover the real source of a problem and the potential solutions. These include:

- **Issue trees** that break down larger problems into smaller, more manageable pieces for a team to solve. **(You can learn more about issues trees [here](#).)**
- **Delivery chain analysis** that identifies where implementation may be going wrong along the path of a reform strategy, from the intent of system leaders all the way to impact in the classroom. **(You can learn more about delivery chain analysis [here](#).)**
- **Field work and evidence-gathering** that will allow your team to investigate the potential issues and/or solutions surfaced by these tools.

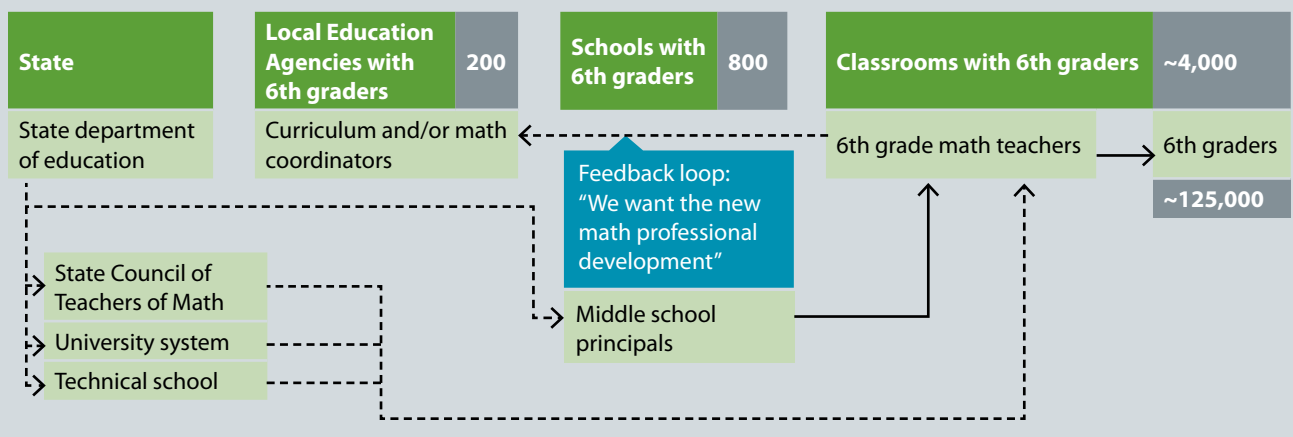
CASE STORY: USING DELIVERY CHAIN ANALYSIS TO SOLVE PROBLEMS IN A PARCC STATE

As one PARCC state rolled out its latest mathematics standards, it confronted a common challenge: The related professional development depended heavily on a train-the-trainers model and was failing to reach the classroom. To solve this problem, state leaders examined the delivery chain and looked for the weak link. They found it at the district level: Individual curriculum directors had no incentive or motivation to change their existing professional development practices — which meant that a multihour professional development session often got watered down to a 30-minute (or less) mention in an after-school meeting. The state’s analysis is shown in the exhibit below; the weak link it had identified was rooted in weak relationships between the department and the relevant district personnel.

To solve this problem, the state redesigned the delivery chain to circumvent the curriculum directors in districts. It partnered with several respected state entities — including two leading universities and the state Council of Teachers of Mathematics — to promulgate the new professional development through principals and directly to teachers. Initially, this strategy exposed more teachers to the right professional development, but there was a secondary effect: Teachers who had not received the new training began asking their curriculum directors what they were missing.

Solving Problems by Finding New, Indirect Routes to the Classroom (EXAMPLE)

New delivery chain for new math curriculum professional development (6th grade)



Through analysis of its delivery chain, the state was able to identify the root cause of its problem and identify a solution for it.

Once the root causes and potential solutions of a problem have been identified, there are **intervention tools** at your system’s disposal to get delivery back on track. These include:

- **Positive pressure/convening around best practices:** If implementation is going wrong in the field, convenings or demonstrations are critical tools for communication and dialogue about what should be happening.
- **Evaluation/restructuring/termination of vendor contracts:** Public agencies often underuse the leverage that they have over vendors in the contracting process. If vendor behavior is the source of an issue with CCSS implementation, aggressive contract management is the only real means to resolve it.

- **Rejection or conditional approval of a district's consolidated plans:** State education agencies also underuse the leverage they have in the consolidated planning process. If consolidated plans are to be a meaningful way to influence implementation of CCSS in the field, agencies must be willing to withhold funding until school districts and schools get these plans right.
- **Use of Title I/accountability levers to raise concerns:** Likewise, the current federal accountability framework provides for a set of potential interventions in underperforming districts and schools. These actions — or the mere threat of these — can create an opportunity for meaningful dialogue around CCSS implementation.

A robust and deliberate strategy for dealing with unforeseen challenges will ultimately lessen their adverse impact, allowing your strategic implementation team to keep CCSS implementation on track.

Sustain and Build Momentum

Routines are crucial to drive success in the implementation effort. Done right, these routines will begin to demonstrate success quickly. Even as the first positive results come in, it is crucial that you not declare victory prematurely. The hard and grinding work of sustaining progress is just beginning. These early wins can either serve as fuel to inspire further improvement or be squandered in self-congratulation. The strategic implementation team must persist through the distractions, manage those who continue to resist change, challenge the status quo vigorously and celebrate success at every opportunity. Luckily, the time spent *planning* for implementation has already given you the tools to *drive* implementation. The following five actions can help sustain and build momentum:

- **Develop the compelling and effective message and stay on it!** At every turn — every speech, every public appearance or hearing, every state or school board meeting — take the opportunity to share your three key communications messages and provide an update on implementation progress. Think of the effort as a marketing person would. Saturating key audiences with consistent messages is a good thing.
- **Keep the guiding coalition secure but fresh.** This will involve tasking the coalition with proactive actions to build public support as well as helping state or district leaders play defense when necessary. Careful attention should be given to shifts and changes in political leadership.
- **Constantly give time and pay attention to key leaders in the delivery chain.** This is especially true for those links in the chain that are weak. Are regional structures ably playing the role intended for them? Who can rise to lead the instructional improvement efforts(s) in struggling districts?
- **Connect state efforts to the national landscape.** This involves finding a state or district that people in your state or district relate to and use its progress as leverage in your own state. For a state in PARCC, for example, this might involve pegging your implementation efforts to those in a neighboring PARCC state.
- **Use data constantly.** The guiding coalition and key messengers should all know the current performance data in your state or district and refer to these numbers to reinforce why the CCSS implementation effort is needed. Data are personality neutral and can be effectively used to disarm arguments as well as to demonstrate and celebrate success.

When things are not going well, these actions will help you battle the inevitable excuses. When things are going well, they will help you maintain a sense of urgency and avoid conflating “good” with “great.” **You can learn more about how to sustain and continually build momentum [here](#).**

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