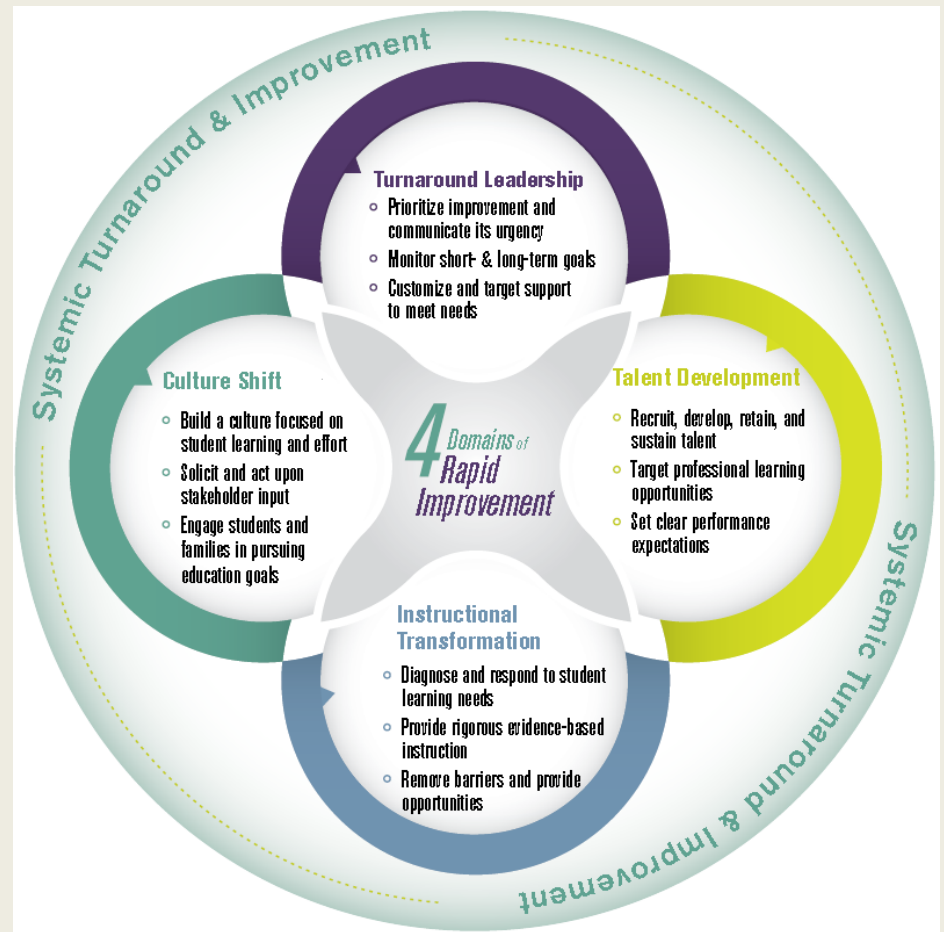# Four Domains for School Boards

This document was created for the CST School Board Training program – Activities 9 & 10.

Some of the content includes excerpts from the following resources:

• Corbett, J. & Redding, S. Using Needs Assessments for School and District Improvement, A Tactical Guide. Center for School Turnaround and Council of Chief State School Officers. 2017.

• Four Domains for Rapid School Improvement: A Systems Framework. Center for School Turnaround. 2017.

THE CENTER ON SCHOOL TURNAROUND WestEd

Four Domains Framework

Despite a continued and intense local, state, and federal focus on turnaround over the past 15 years, improvement efforts have yielded mixed results, with individual turnaround schools appearing as islands of excellence in a sea of otherwise frustrated expectations. What educators and policymakers have learned during this period of intense focus on turnaround is that the always-challenging endeavor of significantly improving the performance of individual schools is most likely to be successful when receiving support from beyond the individual school and its community. Rapid improvement can be bolstered or stalled by the system within which a school operates, a system that, in addition to the school itself, encompasses the state education department and the local district. To the extent that this broader system — state, district, school — is recast to actively support dramatic school improvement across the board, it will allow us to progress beyond the current state of having islands of excellence to a point where all schools are able to provide all students with the education they deserve.

To support educators in creating such systems, the Center on School Turnaround at WestEd (CST) has developed a framework to assist states, districts, and schools in leading and managing rapid improvement efforts. The framework shares, in practical language, the critical practices of successful school turnaround in four domains, or areas of focus, that research and experience suggest are central to rapid and significant improvement: turnaround leadership, talent development, instructional transformation, and culture shift. At a more fine-grained level, the framework then offers examples of how each practice would be put into action at each level of the system.

The framework was created by a CST task force, with input from CST's leadership team as well as from members of the Network of State Turnaround and Improvement Leaders (NSTIL) Advisory Council, which includes SEA personnel from across the country who are responsible for school turnaround in their respective state. The framework is based on what has been learned from the research on turnaround, including lessons from improvement work under NCLB and promising practices from among the SIG efforts, as well as from the experience of CST's turnaround experts and partners.

Excerpts from the Introduction of Four Domains for Rapid School Improvement: A Systems Framework. Center for School Turnaround. 2017. Retrieved from: http://centeronschoolturnaround.org/four-domains/

Connecting the Domains to Needs Assessments

While creating the Tactical Guide, <u>Using Needs Assessments for School and District Improvement,</u> the components of the Four Domains Framework were adapted into possible indicators to include in a school and/or district needs assessment. These needs assessment indicators probe at the implementation of the Four Domains, and with sound data analysis and constructive conversations, result in in-depth root cause analysis.

With the addition of some district-level systems indicators, the suggested indicators could be useful for local school boards to determine if school and district improvement planning reflects the school's needs and provides avenues for monitoring change.

The indicators identified on the following pages are not all inclusive; schools, districts, and local boards may want to add other indicators to meet their needs.

In preparation for Activity 10 of the CST School Board Training program, review the indicators on the following pages and identify at least one from each page that makes you "wow" and at least one that makes you "wonder." You can circle, star, or write down the indicators to remind you of your choices. An example for the last page (Other Systems and Structures) might be:

• WOW – it'd be great if our district had all vendors on performance contracts.

• WONDER – have any of our schools completed an asset scan of all of our community resources recently?

Corbett, J. & Redding, S. (2017). *Using Needs Assessments for School and District Improvement, A Tactical Guide*. Center for School Turnaround and Council of Chief State School Officers. Retrieved from: http://centeronschoolturnaround.org/new-cst-publication-using-needs-assessments-for-school-and-district-improvement/

TURNAROUND LEADERSHIP

Prioritize improvement and communicate urgency

Examples of Needs Assessment Indicators

• School and district leaders set a clear vision for the school and the district's direction.

• School and district leaders make sure everyone understands their role in continuously elevating professional practice.

• School leaders model and communicate the expectation that improved student learning will come from careful implementation of effective practices.

• District leaders work towards effective implementation of practice and policy.

• Leadership is appropriately distributed among several roles, including lead teachers.

• Members of the school Leadership Team (e.g., principal and lead teachers) meet regularly.

• Members of the district leadership team work across traditional silos to meet student needs.

• The school and district Leadership Teams share in decisions of real substance pertaining to curriculum, instruction, and professional learning.

• School and district leaders and teachers have high expectations for students.

Monitor short- and long-term goals

Examples of Needs Assessment Indicators

• School leaders develop and update an improvement plan.

• The district improvement plan supports the school's plan.

• The school and the district's improvement plans include both short- and long-term goals, with milestones to gauge progress.

• School and district leaders monitor implementation of improvement strategies and change personnel, programs, policies, and methods as needed to keep the effort on track.

• School and district leaders intervene swiftly if progress on improvement strategies wanes.

• School and district leaders communicate progress on improvement goals to all constituencies.

Customize and target supports to meet needs

Examples of Needs Assessment Indicators

• The district grants school leaders reasonable autonomy to reallocate resources (e.g., personnel, funding, schedule) to address school priorities.

• The district grants school leaders reasonable autonomy to make decisions to address school priorities.

• School leaders regularly measure and report to stakeholders progress in implementing improvement strategies.

• School leaders regularly measure and report to stakeholders progress in meeting student learning goals.

• School and district leaders regularly and systematically track progress toward implementation milestones and recommend necessary changes in course.

• School and district leaders act swiftly to make changes when something is not going well.

While many of the example indicator items are school based, the systems, practices, and policies of the LEA must also be analyzed.

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Recruit, develop, retain, & sustain talent

Examples of Needs Assessment Indicators

• The school and the district operate with a transparent system of procedures and protocols for recruiting, evaluating, rewarding, and replacing staff.

• The school and the district successfully recruit and retain highly qualified teachers.

• The school matches candidate competencies with school priorities and needs.

• The school provides an induction program to support new teachers in their first years of teaching.

• The district personnel policies ensure that the most effective teachers work with the students with the greatest needs.

Target professional learning opportunities

Examples of Needs Assessment Indicators

• The school and the district provide professional learning that is appropriate for individual teachers and staff with different experience and expertise.

• The school aligns professional learning with identified needs, based on staff evaluation and student performance.

• The school provides all staff high-quality, ongoing, job-embedded, and differentiated professional learning.

• The school provides learning opportunities for teachers so that they are always getting better at professional practice.

• The school and the district utilize non-traditional teaching models to ensure that the most effective teachers work with the students with the greatest needs.

• District staff receive relevant professional learning opportunities to increase their capacity to serve students.

Set clear performance expectations

Examples of Needs Assessment Indicators

• School and district leaders communicate clear goals for employees' performance that reflect the established evaluation system.

• School and district leaders facilitate swift exits of underperforming employees to minimize further damage.

• Professional learning for teachers is aligned with classroom observation and teacher evaluation criteria.

• School leaders expect a lot of teachers so that students get the best education possible.

• District staff have clear performance expectations to ensure that the system operates effectively for student learning.

While many of the example indicator items are school based, the systems, practices, and policies of the LEA must also be analyzed.

Diagnose and respond to student needs

Examples of Needs Assessment Indicators

• Student progress is assessed frequently, using a variety of evaluation methods, and a record of the results is maintained.

• Teachers individualize instructional plans in response to individual student performance on pre-tests and other methods of assessment to provide support for some students and enhanced learning opportunities for others.

• Instructional teams and teachers use fine-grained data to design learning paths tailored to each student's prior learning, personal interests, and aspirations.

• Teachers demonstrate the value of the teacher-student relationship by engaging students and their families in order to reach each student in the most effective way.

• The school's teachers know what each student needs and do their best to provide it.

• The district works with the school to provide adequate resources to meet student needs.

Provide rigorous, evidence-based instruction

Examples of Needs Assessment Indicators

• Teachers are guided by a document that aligns standards, curriculum, instruction, and assessment.

• Teachers develop, and submit for feedback, lesson plans based on aligned units of instruction.

• Teachers use a variety of instructional modes (whole-class, teacher-directed groups, student-directed groups, independent work, computer-based, and homework).

• Students are well prepared for each next step through the school system.

• The school and district implement programs with fidelity.

• The school and district eliminate ineffective programs and practices.

Remove barriers and provide opportunities

Examples of Needs Assessment Indicators

• The school provides all students with opportunities to enroll in and master rigorous coursework for college and career readiness.

• School staff teach and reinforce positive social skills, self-respect, strong relationships, and responsibility for the consequences of decisions and actions.

• School staff are attentive to students' emotional states, guide students in managing their emotions, and arrange for supports and interventions when necessary.

• The school assists students and their families in accessing needed community resources.

• The district supports the school meet student and family needs by developing partnerships with community organizations and removing barriers to accessing supports.

While many of the example indicator items are school based, the systems, practices, and policies of the LEA must also be analyzed.

CULTURE SHIFT

Build a strong school community focused on learning

Examples of Needs Assessment Indicators

•School and district leaders celebrate successes while keeping the focus on longer-term learning goals.

•The school and the district create opportunities for members of the community to come together to discuss, explore, and reflect on student learning.

•The ongoing conversation between school/district personnel and families is candid and supportive, and flows in both directions.

•Professional learning programs for teachers include assistance in working effectively with families.

•The school communicates regularly with families about learning standards, their children's progress, and the families' role in their children's school success.

Solicit and act upon stakeholder input

Examples of Needs Assessment Indicators

•School leaders provide teachers with ample opportunity to voice their opinions.

•District leaders provide school and district staff ample opportunity to voice their opinions.

•School and district leaders provide parents with ample opportunity to voice their opinions.

•The school and district use surveys, focus groups, and suggestion boxes to gather stakeholder input on the current operations of the school and its programs, and on suggested improvements.

•School and district's leaders report to stakeholders the input they have provided, their suggested improvements, and the response to that input.

Engage students and families in pursuing education goals

Examples of Needs Assessment Indicators

•The school intentionally builds students' personal competencies to pursue goals and persist with tasks.

•The school intentionally builds students' skills in appraising their progress, applying learning strategies, and directing their learning.

•The school systematically engages parents with their students in reviewing their students' educational progress, setting college and career goals, and planning the students' education future.

•The school and the district helps students and parents understand and use a variety of data sources about student progress and interests.

•The school and the district utilizes community resources and provides community-based learning experiences to help students understand career and education options.

While many of the example indicator items are school based, the systems, practices, and policies of the LEA must also be analyzed.

These categories and indicators are not part of the Center on School Turnaround's Four Domains framework; they are examples of needs assessment (NA) components that may be added to supplement the NA framework categories and indicators. A framework is a foundation for the needs assessment, but additional components may be necessary.

OTHER SYSTEMS & STRUCTURES

Resource allocation and management

• A comprehensive resource asset scan has been completed and used to make decisions pertaining to resource allocations.

• Assessments of programs and practices are regularly reviewed.

• Resources are prioritized for students and schools with the greatest needs.

• Any short-term grants or sources of funds are used strategically to address urgent needs or short-term capacity building.

Use of external partners

• All external partners work under performance contracts.

• All external partners operate with clear performance expectations.

• Contracts with external partners are renewed or continued only upon review of performance.

Community engagement

• The local school board and the community receive regular updates about schools and their progress.

• The local school board works efficiently and effectively.

• The LEA and the local school board communicate about school and LEA needs.

• The community is engaged in and committed to the improvement process and work.