



**Four Domains for Significant and Sustainable Charter School Improvement**

**A Systems Framework for the Charter Context**

School Name\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_

# Process of Improvement



## Assess Needs

5 Whys Protocol

Organizational Alignment

## Create Plan

A Theory of Action - “If we do X activity or approach, then we are likely to get Y outcome”

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| **Leadership** | The style and competencies of the leader and his or her senior leadership team. |
| * How do you as the leader need to change? * Do you need more flexibility in your leadership to allow for mistakes and corrections? * While supporting those involved in the new model, how do you balance being supportive versus being overbearing or micromanaging? | |
| **Critical Tasks & Interdependencies** | The essential work in the building/online, (i.e., instruction, curriculum, teaching, learning). The collaboration and coordination needed between teachers across subjects and grade levels to effectively carry out the work of teaching and learning. |
| * What changes will be made to the essential work (i.e., instruction, curriculum, teaching, and learning)? * How will progress/success be measured? * Who are the individuals/groups who have the power to influence whether others are supportive of the change? (Examine who has the critical expertise you will need, what is at stake for these individuals/groups, and who are those powerful individuals/groups likely to resist?) * How will the current practices of collaboration around the essential work of schools (instruction, curriculum, teaching, and learning) need to change? | |
| **Structures & Systems** | The roles, responsibilities, formal reporting structure, incentives, the building, equipment, technology, schedule, metrics, safety, and the data systems in the organization. |
| * How do the school’s system & structures need to change? * Will teachers need more scheduled collaborative time to exchange experiences and get peer feedback? * Do current assessment practices and tools adapt well to the new teaching model? * Is there anything about the new learning model? Are teachers and staff prepared to be more flexible when something changes unexpectedly? * Are teachers willing to learn and modify strategies as they implement change? | |
| **Capabilities** | The skills, capacities, and attitudes of teachers, support individuals, administrators, and other employees. |
| * How do the school’s capabilities need to change? * What specific new skills do teachers and staff need to develop to implement and assess the new instructional model in their classrooms? * When they start using the new model, how much follow-up coaching will they need? * With whom do they share successes and problems of practice? * How will you know the teachers are implementing the change? | |
| **Culture** | The norms, values, and beliefs of the people in the organization, as well as the resulting behaviors and artifacts that represent those beliefs. |
| * In what way does the school’s culture need to change? * Do teachers need to understand and acknowledge a broader range of skills associated with the new learning model? * Are teachers and staff prepared to be more flexible when something changes unexpectedly? * Are teachers willing to learn and modify strategies as they implement change? | |

# Four Domains for Significant and Sustainable Charter School Improvement





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| **Domain 1 - Improvement Leadership** | | | |
| Self-Reflection Questions for the Improvement Leadership DomainWhat are your short- and long-term school improvement goals for meeting renewal conditions?How will data be used to customize resources and other supports for improvement efforts?What structures or processes are in place for assessing improvement progress? How will progress on achieving goals be monitored, tracked, and communicated? Who will be held accountable for creating timelines and updating the team on progress?Who will determine what interim assessments will be administered and analyzed?Who will be held accountable for analyzing and reporting the results of the interim assessments? How will the results of the interim assessments be reported to everyone involved?How will you know if improvement goals have been successfully met? How is success defined?What data will be monitored to identify successes and challenges in student outcomes for school improvement?Who will be held accountable for monitoring and reporting changes in student outcomes?How will you determine if solutions are evidenced-based?How will you publicly advocate for your lowest-performing school(s) and your improvement process? What steps need to be established for this advocacy process, andHow will you sustain the improvement efforts from the start?What is your plan for engaging students, parents and other community stakeholders in the improvement process? | | | |
| Practice 1: Prioritize improvement oriented to the outcomes needed for charter renewal  * 1. In collaboration with the board, conduct a needs assessment to determine the school’s effectiveness in each of the four domains, examining current and historical student and school outcomes.   2. Guided by findings from the needs assessment and the board’s financial analysis of the school, co-develop with the board a detailed improvement plan that sets the strategic direction for the improvement effort and that establishes clear policies, structures, and expectations for constituents to work toward ambitious improvement goals.   3. With the board, share improvement priorities with staff, students and their families, and the larger school community, leveraging local media outlets to announce the school’s commitment to change and to enlist parent and community partners in the effort. Advocate fiercely for the support that is needed for success. | | | |
| *Example of How Charter Schools Can Enact This Practice:*  Obtain formal commitment from the school’s board to initiate improvement, and, together, undertake a needs assessment to assess needs in each domain. With the board, use the needs assessment results and fiscal data provided by the board to prioritize and target improvement actions in this domain, capturing them in a detailed plan that, among other things, identifies evidenced-based strategies for student outcomes. The plan should include a clearly articulated vision and strategic direction for improvement to meet the needs of all students and should identify clear policies, structures, and expectations for advancing ambitious improvement goals oriented toward meeting renewal conditions. Increasingly share leadership to solidify staff commitment, increase schoolwide collaboration, and provide staff with new challenges to keep them meaningfully engaged in the improvement effort. | | | |
| Improvement Goal | Immediate (0-3 months) | Short Term (2-8 months) | Long Term (6-12 months) |
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| Practice 2: Establish and monitor short- and long-term goals  1. Establish milestones for gauging progress. Continually update timelines and tasks to maintain the pace needed to accomplish meaningful goals quickly. 2. Closely monitor, discuss, report, and act on the progress of rapid improvement. 3. Use data to make timely changes in policy, programs, and personnel in order to stay on track in achieving desired results for students. Capitalize on early improvement-related successes and momentum to shift the focus from change itself to incorporating and establishing effective organizational processes, structures, and interactions that contribute to continuous organizational improvement. | | | |
| *Example of How Charter Schools Can Enact This Practice:*  Regularly update the improvement plan to ensure that it has clear short-term goals aligned to long- term goals. Working collaboratively with the board, identify the early indicators of expected progress and establish formal structures for using data to monitor implementation progress and make changes in personnel, programs, and methods as needed to keep the effort on track. Be transparent by sharing  frequent progress updates and other improvement-related information with staff; allow for opportunities for staff to provide input and raise questions. Intervene swiftly if progress is not evident or has slowed. | | | |
| Improvement Goal | Immediate (0-3 months) | Short Term (2-8 months) | Long Term (6-12 months) |
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| Practice 3: Align operations and target evidence-based supports to address needs  1. Ensure that school staff members have the customized, targeted, timely, and evidenced- based support needed for their improvement efforts. 2. Align operations and resources to ensure coherence and integration and to eliminate any unnecessary initiatives. 3. Through regular progress monitoring, identify any needed reallocation of resources and support and act quickly and competently to address those needs. | | | |
| *Example of How Charter Schools Can Enact This Practice:*  The improvement plan should identify practices aimed at realizing the vision of significantly improved student learning. With the board, align the budget to support the improvement plan, identifying any related fundraising needs. Identify and implement evidence-based interventions to address priorities. | | | |
| Improvement Goal | Immediate (0-3 months) | Short Term (2-8 months) | Long Term (6-12 months) |
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| **Domain 2 - Talent Development** | | | |
| Self-Reflection Questions for the Improvement Talent Development Domain  * 1. What are the important improvement-related competencies for teachers in your context?   2. If you do not use competencies in making talent decisions, how will you identify the skills and aptitudes needed for leaders and teachers working in a school that is pursuing improvement?   3. Who will be responsible for identifying the hiring needs of a school engaged in improvement?   4. What are the professional learning needs of leadership and staff conducting improvement? What steps need to be accomplished to fulfill those needs?   5. Who will be held accountable for setting clear performance expectations for staff? How will they determine those expectations? How will staff be assessed or held accountable for achieving those performance expectations?   6. How will you create consensus and understanding of teacher assignments?   7. How will high-performing teachers be leveraged to expand their positive influence outside just their own classrooms?   8. Who will be responsible for providing and leading the professional learning opportunities and experiences for leadership and staff conducting improvement efforts? How can you ensure that professional learning will be ongoing, responsive, and customized? | | | |
| Practice 1: Recruit, develop, retain, and sustain talent  1. Proactively implement a talent management plan for recruiting and developing individuals with the competencies needed for improvement efforts, so as to be able to quickly fill vacancies that will inevitably occur during the improvement process. 2. Use multiple sources of data to match candidate skills and competencies to school needs, making it a priority to find talent to serve the highest-need groups of students. 3. Institute succession-planning activities, including creation of in-house preparation programs designed to foster and develop the competencies of current staff so that, as administrators and educators, they will be prepared to continually lead improvement efforts. | | | |
| *Example of How Charter Schools Can Enact This Practice:*  Develop a school-specific competency model for the particular school to discern which competencies should be prioritized in the teacher-selection process in this school. Encourage aspiring leaders to participate in preparation programs that build the skills needed to lead and conduct significant improvement efforts. | | | |
| Improvement Goal | Immediate (0-3 months) | Short Term (2-8 months) | Long Term (6-12 months) |
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| Practice 2: Target professional learning opportunities  1. Offer high-quality individualized and responsive professional learning opportunities designed to build the capacity needed for rapid school improvement. 2. Offer regular opportunities for job-embedded learning, including coaching, mentoring, and observation (including peer observations). 3. Leverage and maximize the effectiveness of high-performing teachers and leaders by using them as models and peer coaches. | | | |
| *Example of How Charter Schools Can Enact This Practice:*  Create a cadre of instructional leaders (drawing from assistant principals, department coordinators, team leaders, and teachers with demonstrated instructional coaching capacity) who each are given responsibility to use data to identify and respond to the professional learning needs of a manageable portion of the faculty. Provide opportunities for leaders and teachers to learn side by side and to share how their own ongoing growth affects their individual practice as organizational and instructional leaders. Ensure that professional learning opportunities at the school are differentiated, purposeful, targeted, employed in rapid response to identified needs, reflective of what is known about effective adult learning, and clearly connected to the school’s improvement priorities. | | | |
| Improvement Goal | Immediate (0-3 months) | Short Term (2-8 months) | Long Term (6-12 months) |
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| Practice 3: Set clear performance expectations  1. Create and share expectations for each level of professional performance by every role at the school. 2. Develop and implement performance-management processes that include clear means for monitoring teachers’ capacity-development progress, the flexibility to rapidly respond to professional learning needs, and opportunities to revise professional learning milestones as needed. | | | |
| *Example of How Charter Schools Can Enact This Practice:*  Review and refine job descriptions and expectations to reflect high impact but realistic responsibilities for supporting rapid charter school improvement. Clearly define expectations for teachers, considering how to effectively leverage teacher time and effort. Develop a daily and weekly schedule that reflects this priority of effective use of teacher time. When asking more of teachers, consider rebalancing their responsibilities by eliminating some that are a low priority. | | | |
| Improvement Goal | Immediate (0-3 months) | Short Term (2-8 months) | Long Term (6-12 months) |
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| **Domain 3 – Instructional Transformation** | | | |
| Self-Reflection Questions for the Improvement Talent Development Domain  1. What types of early-warning systems are available or can be developed to identify students who may be falling behind? Who will be held accountable for establishing them? 2. How can funds be leveraged to provide additional academic supports, extended learning opportunities, credit-recovery programs, and virtual courses? Are there stakeholders who would be willing to financially support these programs? 3. What types of higher-level courses have been offered in the past, and have they worked well to support advanced learning for gifted or advanced students? What can schools do differently to challenge gifted or advanced students? What types of programs are offered for students who are exceeding their learning goals? 4. How can teachers give students authentic experiences to connect their interests with real- world applications? 5. What learning benchmarks will teachers use to guide and track the progress of students? 6. How will possible barriers to student learning — both academic and nonacademic — be identified, and how can the school work to remove them? 7. How will teachers diagnose each individual student’s learning needs? What tools, systems, and structures need to be established? 8. What interventions are used to help students who are falling behind? How might those be adjusted or changed? Who will be included in the team to adjust or change those interventions? 9. How do teachers challenge students that are exceeding their current level of schooling? 10. How could flexible grouping of students be implemented and supported? 11. How will alignment of instruction with standards be facilitated? 12. How will teachers guide and track the progress of each student? What tools, systems, and structures need to be established, and who will establish them? 13. How does your school involve community members, other schools, and stakeholders in offering internships, career exploration, and service-learning opportunities? Who will be responsible for helping make these connections for your students? | | | |
| Practice 1: Diagnose and respond to student learning needs  1. Diagnose student learning needs and use identified needs to drive all instructional decisions. 2. Incorporate effective student supports and instructional interventions. 3. Use regular and ongoing assessment and flexible adjustment of instructional grouping and delivery to adapt to student learning needs. | | | |
| *Example of How Charter Schools Can Enact This Practice:*  Develop protocols to assist teachers in using data to uncover individual student needs and creating instructional action plans aligned to those needs. Explore creative and more effective use of instructional time, which may include options for extended learning, such as longer school days, weeks, or year, to support each student’s needs, and structure and staff any additional instructional time to ensure high-quality learning will occur by using proven practices for teaching. Share assessment results with teachers to use in frequent progress monitoring of student outcomes.  Regularly and routinely examine individual student data by a student’s individual teacher in the classroom and, also, by teacher groups in team meetings, professional learning communities, or other planning sessions. Use flexible instructional groupings rather than year-long assignments that may not meet students’ (or teachers’) needs. For example, when students are having difficulty mastering important content, they could be temporarily assigned to a teacher who uses instructional strategies that are different from those of the students’ current teacher, be placed in a small group for reteaching, or be given individualized instruction. Give teachers time within the school day to analyze student work to better understand each student’s learning needs and to develop plans to address those needs. Hold teachers accountable for student learning and for modifying and adjusting students’ learning experiences to reach the learning goals. | | | |
| Improvement Goal | Immediate (0-3 months) | Short Term (2-8 months) | Long Term (6-12 months) |
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| Practice 2: Provide rigorous evidence-based instruction  1. Set high academic standards and ensure students’ access to rigorous evidence and standards-based curricula. 2. Provide supports to ensure that instructional planning is guided by evidence of student learning needs and that instruction incorporates evidence-based practices to facilitate student learning. 3. As gaps are identified in curriculum and/or instructional delivery, develop plans to strengthen these missing components. | | | |
| *Example of How Charter Schools Can Enact This Practice:*  Work with instructional leadership teams to plan and provide ongoing professional learning opportunities for teachers on both content knowledge and evidence-based instruction. Coordinate vertical alignment so that teachers understand what their students should have learned the prior year, before entering their classroom, and what their students will be expected to learn the next year, after leaving their classroom. Examine curricular and instructional supports to ensure that they are rigorous, grounded in evidence, and aligned with the state standards. Conduct a curriculum analysis that maps lesson plans against standards to ensure that the plans adequately reflect the standards. Ensure that in each instructional mode utilized — whether whole class, small group, independent work, technology-based, or homework — teachers routinely utilize the best instructional practices for that mode. The school leader supports teachers’ development of those practices. | | | |
| Improvement Goal | Immediate (0-3 months) | Short Term (2-8 months) | Long Term (6-12 months) |
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| Practice 3: Remove barriers and provide opportunities  1. Systematically identify any barriers to student learning; for students who demonstrate early mastery, identify ways to enhance their learning opportunities. 2. Partner with community-based organizations or service providers (e.g., health and wellness organizations, youth development organizations) or with other schools (e.g., other charters, traditional public or private schools) to support students in overcoming obstacles and developing the personal competencies that propel success in school and life. | | | |
| *Example of How Charter Schools Can Enact This Practice:*  Based on a curriculum analysis, determine if and what adjustments and supports are needed to ensure that all students have access to the curriculum. Track student progress and, as needed, help students regain lost academic ground by providing supports (e.g., tutoring, co-curricular activities, tiered interventions), extended learning opportunities (e.g., summer bridge programs, after-school and supplemental educational services, Saturday academies, enrichment programs), credit-recovery programs, and virtual courses. For students demonstrating enough prior mastery, provide access  to higher-level assignments and courses. Network with nearby organizations in the community to identify available supports — or to generate new supports — for students. Consider having medical, dental, and other health services regularly available on site. Provide onsite laundry service for families in need. Provide food for students during extended learning sessions and other periods when they are at school outside regular school hours. | | | |
| Improvement Goal | Immediate (0-3 months) | Short Term (2-8 months) | Long Term (6-12 months) |
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| **Domain 4 – Culture Shift** | | | |
| Self-Reflection Questions for the Improvement Talent Development Domain  1. How will you include members of the community in your improvement efforts? How will you encourage them to participate in the improvement process? 2. How will you communicate the progress of your improvement efforts? Who will be held accountable for this communication? How will the path be made clear to everyone? 3. How will you work with your school leadership team and teachers to acknowledge and include their ideas in creating a culture that values effort, respect, and academic achievement? 4. How will you invite parents and community members to engage in meaningful dialogue? How will you include their ideas in your process for creating a culture that values effort, respect, and academic achievement? | | | |
| Practice 1: Build a sustainable school community intensely focused on student learning  * 1. Celebrate successes of students, families, teachers, and leaders — starting with quick wins early in the improvement process. Early success promotes an expectation for further success and engenders confidence in the competence of colleagues.   2. Provide explicit expectations and support for each person’s role (i.e., behaviors expected of them) in the improvement process, including student progress.   3. Create opportunities for members of the school community to come together to discuss, explore, and reflect on student learning. Frequently share schoolwide progress and student learning results with parents.   4. Champion high expectations (of self and others); embed these expectations in everyday practice and language; and reinforce them through shared accountability for, and follow- through on, strategies for dramatically improving student outcomes. | | | |
| *Example of How Charter Schools Can Enact This Practice:*  Establish systems (i.e., structures, policies, procedures, and routines) for focused collaborative work; recognize students both for effort and for academic mastery; and recognize job satisfaction and staff camaraderie as essential assets in an improvement effort. Align personnel evaluations with role-specific expectations for improvement. Maintain a positive, encouraging culture for students in the classroom and schoolwide, one in which students feel safe and supported in sharing their needs, struggles, and concerns. Do the same for teachers and other staff. Recognize each incremental improvement but keep the focus on ultimate results at the student, teacher, and school levels.  Celebrate staff accomplishments and offer recognition for hard work and improvement. Frequently and openly review and discuss with stakeholder’s data on improvement progress (including implementation and leading indicators). | | | |
| Improvement Goal | Immediate (0-3 months) | Short Term (2-8 months) | Long Term (6-12 months) |
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| Practice 2: Solicit and act on stakeholder satisfaction and input  1. Periodically gather from school personnel, students, families, and the broader community their perceptions about the degree to which the school climate is or is not positive; use results to gauge the climate-related work that remains to be done by a school striving for improvement and to guide ongoing efforts.98 2. Consider stakeholder perceptions when identifying climate-related priorities and improving the underlying conditions that contribute to school climate challenges.99 3. Solicit parental feedback; acknowledge and respond to constructive feedback, suggestions, and criticism.100 | | | |
| *Example of How Charter Schools Can Enact This Practice:*  Learn what constituents think by conducting surveys, convening forums or focus groups, and providing suggestion boxes. Share and act on what is learned. Take constituent input into account when making programmatic decisions. Consistently demonstrate that all voices are heard. | | | |
| Improvement Goal | Immediate (0-3 months) | Short Term (2-8 months) | Long Term (6-12 months) |
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| Practice 3: Engage students and their families in pursuing education goals  * 1. Intentionally build students’ personal competencies to pursue goals, persist with tasks, appraise their own progress, hone their learning strategies, and direct their own learning so as to further enhance students’ capacity to learn and succeed.   2. Provide students with opportunities to connect their learning in school with their personal interests and aspirations.   3. Meaningfully engage parents in their child’s learning, progress, interests, and long-term goals. | | | |
| *Example of How Charter Schools Can Enact This Practice:*  Programmatically and systematically build students’ skills in setting learning goals, managing their learning, and pursuing their goals, by having them measure and review their progress on coursework and their progress toward their postsecondary goals; inform and engage families in planning and supporting their students’ education goals; provide students and their families with a full explanation of assessment results and interest inventories to help them make the best decisions; and tap community resources and expertise to expand students’ understanding of potential careers and education options. Provide line items in the school budget for resources related to family engagement that are specifically intended to support student learning; analyze data reflecting the school’s progress with family engagement and include results in monthly board reports; and set aside time and provide structures for convening parent groups focused on improved student learning. | | | |
| Improvement Goal | Immediate (0-3 months) | Short Term (2-8 months) | Long Term (6-12 months) |
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