Turning a Project or Pilot into a Catalyst for Systemic Change and Sustainability

New initiatives usually are developed and initially implemented as a pilot demonstration at one or more schools. This is particularly the case for new initiatives that are specially funded projects.

For those involved in projects or piloting new school programs, a common tendency is to think about their work as a time limited demonstration. And, other school stakeholders also tend to perceive the work as temporary (e.g., "It will end when the grant runs out." or "I've seen so many reforms come and go; this too shall pass."). This mind set leads to the view that new activities will be fleeting, and it contributes to fragmented approaches and the marginalization of initiatives. It also works against the type of systemic changes needed to sustain and expand major school improvements.

The history of schools is strewn with valuable innovations that were not sustained. Naturally, financial considerations play a role in failures to sustain and replicate, but a widespread "project mentality" also is culpable.

Efforts to make substantial and substantive improvements related to mental health in schools and student/learning supports requires much more than implementing a few demonstrations. Improved approaches are only as good as a school district's ability to develop and institutionalize them equitably in all its schools. This process often is called diffusion, replication, roll out, or scale-up. The frequent failure to sustain innovations and take them to scale in school districts has increased interest in understanding systemic change as a central concern in school improvement.

At this point, we should clarify use of the term *systemic change* in the context of schools. The focus is on district and school organization and operations and the networks that shape decision making about fundamental changes and their implementation. From this perspective, systemic change involves modifications that amount to a cultural shift in institutionalized values (i.e., reculturalization). For interventionists, the problem is that the greater the distance and dissonance between the current culture of schools and intended school improvements, the more difficult it is to successfully accomplish major systemic changes.

Our interest in systemic change has evolved over many years of implementing demonstrations and working to institutionalize and diffuse them on a large scale. By now, we are fully convinced that advancing the field requires escaping "project mentality" (sometimes referred to as "projectitis") and becoming sophisticated about facilitating systemic change. Fullan (2005) stresses that what is needed is leadership that "motivates people to take on the complexities and anxieties of difficult change." We would add that such leadership also must develop a refined understanding of how to facilitate systemic change.

On the following pages are examples of steps for turning a project of pilot into a catalyst for systemic change and sustainability.

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Some Ways to Begin

(1) Try to Avoid Having the Work Referred to as a "Project" or "Pilot"

• Designate it as a major 5 year *Initiative* and the current work as *Phase I* of that initiative.

(2) Establish an Initiative Director and Leadership Team to Carry out Initial Organizational Functions and Build Consensus and Ownership Among Stakeholders.

(3) Establish an Infrastructure for the Initiative

• If feasible, move quickly to establish a formal School-Community Collaborative. If this is not feasible initially, establish an Initiative Collaborative Body. In either case, be certain to design an infrastructure to do the necessary work each week and not just a group that meets once a while to share information and complain about problems. Specifically:

> Ensure there is a Steering Team to move the Initiative forward and monitor progress. This should be a group of power leaders who have accepted responsibility and accountability for ensuring that the vision ("big picture") is not lost and barriers to progress are removed. (Examples of power leaders are district superintendent, school board member, high level city and county officials.)

> Enhance the Leadership Team as needed

> Ensure that standing and ad hoc work groups are established to maintain the initiative's momentum by pursuing specific tasks each week. Be certain that key colleagues are involved and that time is taken to develop the capacity of all work groups.

> Ensure that there is dedicated staffing for the collaborative.

(4) Adopt a Comprehensive Vision for the Initiative and Write a Design Document and a "Brief" Clarifying the Work

• The Steering and Leadership Teams for the initiative build consensus about the broad aim, nature, and scope of the initiative (e.g., the emphasis in a vision statement might be on weaving together community and school resources to develop a comprehensive, multifaceted, and cohesive system of interventions so that all students have an equal opportunity to succeed at schools).

• The Steering and Leadership Teams should translate the Initiative into a formal design blueprint delineating the rationale and frameworks that will guide development over the years and then prepare a "white paper," Executive Summary, and set of "talking points" for social marketing.

(5) Start a Process for Translating the Vision into Policy

- With guidance from the Steering Team, the Leadership Team for the initiative forms a work group to prepare a campaign geared to key local and state school and agency policy makers that focuses on (a) establishing a policy framework for the Initiative and (b) ensuring that such policy has a high enough level of priority to end the current marginalized status the Initiative's current efforts may have at schools and in communities

(6) Develop a 5 year Strategic Plan

- The Leadership Team for the initiative forms a work group to draft a 5 year strategic plan that delineates (a) the implementation of the design and (b) the steps to be taken to accomplish the required systemic changes. (The strategic plan will cover such matters as formulation of essential agreements about policy, resources, and practices; assignment of committed leadership; change agents to facilitate systemic changes; infrastructure redesign; enhancement of infrastructure mechanisms; resource mapping, analysis, and redeployment; capacity building; standards, evaluation, quality improvement, and accountability; "social marketing.")

- The Steering Team for the initiative circulates a draft of the plan (a) to elicit suggested revisions from key stakeholders and (b) as part of a process for building consensus and developing readiness for proceeding with its implementation.

- A work group makes relevant revisions based on suggestions.

(7) Move the Strategic Plan to Implementation

- The Steering Team for the initiative ensures that key stakeholders finalize and approve strategic plan and submits the plan on behalf of key stakeholders to school and community decision makers to formulate formal agreements (e.g., MOUs, contracts) for start-up, initial implementation, and on-going revisions that can ensure institutionalization and periodic renewal.

- The Leadership Team for the initiative establishes a work group to develop an action plan for start-up and initial implementation. (The action plan will identify general functions and key tasks to be accomplished, necessary systemic changes, and how to get from here to there in terms of who carries out specific tasks, how, by when, who monitors, etc.)

- The Leadership Team establishes a mechanisms to facilitate necessary systemic changes and guides and monitors implementation, with regular reporting of progress to the Steering Team.

See the attached benchmarks for examples of more detailed steps
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Benchmarks for Monitoring and Reviewing Process and Progress

I. Creating Readiness	Date Started	Date Completed	Current Status
A. Establishment of an Initiative Director and Leadership Team to Carry out Initial Organizational Functions and Build Consensus and Ownership Among Stakeholders.			
B. Establishment of a Collaborative Infrastructure			
C. Adoption of a Comprehensive Vision for the Initiative			
D. Formulation of a Design			
E. Preparation of a Design Document			
F. Prepare a "Brief" Clarifying the Work			
G. Orienting Stakeholders for Widespread Initiative Support (1) Basic ideas and relevant research base are introduced to key stakeholders using "social marketing" strategies >school administrators >school staff >families in the community >business stakeholders _____ _____			
(2) Opportunities for interchange are provided & additional in-depth presentations are made to build a critical mass of consensus for the initiative			
(3) Ongoing evaluation of interest is conducted until a critical mass of stakeholders indicate readiness to pursue a policy commitment			
(4) Ratification and sponsorship are elicited from a critical mass of stakeholders			
H. Establishing Policy Commitment & Framework (1) Establishment of a high level policy and assurance of leadership commitment for sustainability and scale-up			
(2) Policy is translated into a strategic plan that phases in changes using a realistic time line			
(3) Policy is translated into appropriate resource allocations (leadership, staff, space, budget, time)			
(4) Establishment of incentives for change (e.g., intrinsically valued outcomes, expectations for success, recognitions, rewards)			
(5) Establishment of procedural options that reflect stakeholder strengths and from which those expected to implement change can select strategies they see as workable			

	Date Started	Date Completed	Current Status
(6) Establishment of an infrastructure and processes that facilitate change efforts			
(7) Establishment of a change agent position			
(8) Establishment of temporary infrastructure mechanisms for making systemic changes			
(9) Initial capacity-building – developing essential skills among stakeholders to begin implementation			
(10) Benchmarks are used to provide feedback on progress and to make necessary improvements in the process for creating readiness			

II. Start-up and Phase-in	**Date Started**	**Date Completed**	**Current Status**
A. Development of a phase-in action plan			
B. Leadership training for all who will be taking a lead in Implementing the Initiative			
C. Change Team members identified and trained			
D. Preparation for doing gap analysis >problem ("needs") assessment and analysis >mapping and analysis of resources & assets >identification of challenges & barriers			
E. Gap analysis, recommendations, & priority setting			
F. Establishment of additional standing and ad hoc work groups as needed			
G. Establishment of mechanisms for >communication, >problem solving >social marketing			
H. Outreach to other potential participants			

III. Institutionalization (maintaining/sustaining/ creative renewal)	**Date Started**	**Date Completed**	**Current Status**
A. Regular ratification of the Initiative by policy makers			
B. Maintenance of regular budget support			
C. Leadership positions and infrastructure mechanisms incorporated into operational manuals			
D. Formation of procedural plans for ongoing renewal			

An overarching benchmark involves the monitoring of the implementation of evaluation plans.

A Few Resources & References from the Center

Life Beyond the "Project" – Fully Integrating the Effort into the School Improvement Agenda
      http://smhp.psych.ucla.edu/pdfdocs/lifebeyondproject.pdf

Sustainability & Scale-up: It's about Systemic Change (newsletter feature article) –
      http://smhp.psych.ucla.edu/pdfdocs/Newsletter/Fall04.pdf

*Sustaining School-Community Partnerships to Enhance Outcomes for Children and Youth: A Guidebook
      and Tool Kit* – http://smhp.psych.ucla.edu/pdfdocs/sustaining.pdf

"On sustaining project innovations as systemic change" by H.S. Adelman, & L. Taylor (2003).
      Journal of Education and Psychological Consultation,14, 1-25.
      http://smhp.psych.ucla.edu/publications/45 on sustainability of project innovations as systemic change.pdf

Part IV on "Policy and Systemic Change Considerations" in *Mental Health in School & School
      Improvement: Current Status, Concerns, and New Directions*
      http://smhp.psych.ucla.edu/mhbook/Part%20IV%20Intro.pdf

School Improvement Planning: What's Missing? – http://smhp.psych.ucla.edu/whatsmissing.htm

*Addressing What's Missing in School Improvement Planning: Expanding Standards and Accountability
      to Encompass an Enabling or Learning Supports Component* –
      http://smhp.psych.ucla.edu/pdfdocs/enabling/standards.pdf

*Another Initiative? Where Does it Fit? A Unifying Framework and an Integrated Infrastructure for
      Schools to Address Barriers to Learning & Promote Healthy Development* –
      http://smhp.psych.ucla.edu/pdfdocs/infrastructure/anotherinitiative-exec.pdf

Examples from the Initiative Toolkit
      >*a Formal Proposal for Moving in New Directions* –
            http://smhp.psych.ucla.edu/pdfdocs/studentsupport/toolkit/aidj.pdf

      >a design document – *Developing Our Youth: Fulfilling a Promise, Investing in Iowa's Future -
            Enhancing Iowa's Systems of Supports for Learning and Development* –
            http://smhp.psych.ucla.edu/pdfdocs/iowasystemofsupport.pdf
      >*Talking Points - Five Frequently Asked Questions About: Why Address What's Missing in
            School Improvement Planning?* – http://smhp.psych.ucla.edu/summit2002/q&aschoolimprove.pdf

A Few Recent Publications

Adelman, H.S., & Taylor, L. (2006). *The school leader's guide to student learning supports: New
      directions for addressing barriers to learning.* Thousand Oaks, CA: Corwin Press.

Adelman, H.S., & Taylor, L. (2006). *The implementation guide to student learning supports in the
      classroom and schoolwide: New directions for addressing barriers to learning.* Thousand Oaks, CA:
      Corwin Press.

Adelman, H.S., & Taylor, L. (2006). Reorganizing student supports to enhance equity. In E. Lopez, G.
      Esquivel, & S. Nahari (Eds.), *Handbook of multicultural school psychology.* Mahwah, NJ: Lawrence
      Erlbaum Associates.

Adelman, H.S., & Taylor, L. (2007). Systemic change for school improvement. *Journal of Educational
      and Psychological Consultation*, 17, 55-77.