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# Noteworthy PERSPECTIVES

# SUCCESS *in* SIGHT

by Ceri B. Dean,
Mike Galvin, and
Danette Parsley

# Noteworthy
## PERSPECTIVES

# SUCCESS IN SIGHT

by Ceri B. Dean, Mike Galvin
and Danette Parsley

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# PREFACE

*Mid-continent Research for Education and Learning (McREL), located in Denver, Colorado, is a private, nonprofit organization founded in 1966. McREL's mission is to make a difference in the quality of education through applied research, product development, and service.*

Today's schools are complex systems with complex problems. Addressing those problems often requires significant change efforts. However, many school administrators don't know how to select a focus for these efforts or how to lead staff through such changes — and even if they did, the job is too large for one person. One solution to this dilemma is to form partnerships with organizations or consultants who can help get the change process started and help build sufficient local capacity to continue its momentum. This *Noteworthy* focuses on one such solution — *Success in Sight*, McREL's comprehensive, research-based school reform program.

*Success in Sight* provides a framework in which schools can work to improve student achievement. It is a systemic approach that is based on a coherent, articulated theory of change and research on practices associated with improved student achievement. Designed to support a data-driven, standards-based education system, *Success in Sight* promotes continuous improvement and development of a purposeful community that is characterized by the effective use of all available assets, agreed-upon processes, goals that matter to those involved, and a collective belief that the community can accomplish its tasks. *Success in Sight* is built upon the premise that educators have the ability and desire to learn what is necessary to improve student performance, and that improvement efforts should build on the strengths of people and programs rather than focusing solely on weaknesses. And just as teachers need to vary their approaches to helping individual students learn, so too must change agents customize the assistance they provide to individual schools. Reflecting this need, the *Success in Sight* program creates customized plans that help schools address whatever factors (e.g., school practices) are keeping their students from achieving academic success.

This issue of *Noteworthy* explains the *Success in Sight* approach by telling the story of a school involved in the process, presented from the perspective of the school and the change agent. To help readers understand the *Success in Sight* approach, we explain the roots of the approach, as well as the theory of change and theory of action embedded in it. Next, we present the six stages of *Success in Sight*, describing how the stages unfold and detailing select tools used in each stage. Finally, this issue of *Noteworthy* concludes with a discussion of the implications for states, districts, and schools; poses questions that schools can consider to determine if they are ready to successfully engage in school improvement; and offers suggestions for actions to increase their readiness.

This publication was developed through McREL's regional educational laboratory program, funded by the U.S. Department of Education's Institute of Education Sciences to serve the Central Region states of Colorado, Kansas, Missouri, Nebraska, North Dakota, South Dakota, and Wyoming. The laboratory is implementing a comprehensive, problem-based research, development, and service program designed to create the knowledge, tools, and strategies needed to transform low-performing schools into high-performing learning communities.

McREL's national leadership area in the regional laboratory program is standards-based educational practice. For more than a decade, McREL has been at the forefront of research, practice, product development, and evaluation related to standards-based education. This issue of *Noteworthy*, written primarily for school and district leaders, policymakers, and program administrators, draws from the research literature and from McREL's wealth of experience in assisting districts, schools, and educators in implementing standards-based reforms.

The authors wish to acknowledge the contributions of a number of individuals in the preparation of this publication. In particular, thanks go to Greg Cameron, Lou Cicchinelli, Jane Doty, Jane Hill, and Monette McIver for their assistance in refining descriptions of the stages of the approach and providing information that was used to develop the school vignettes. Without their assistance, this journal could not have been written. Appreciation also is extended to external reviewers Mark MacHale and Bev Tarpley, and to McREL staff members Laura Lefkowits and Kirsten Miller for their helpful comments. The authors also would like to acknowledge Zak Pine's design of the cover of this publication and desktop publishing assistance.

# CHAPTER 1 Introduction

In this era of high-stakes assessments, stricter accountability, and greater public scrutiny, staff members in schools across the country are taking stock, assessing their practices, and determining which types of changes will lead to improvements in student achievement. But school improvement can be a daunting task. As decades of educational research (e.g., Hall & Hord, 1987; Fullan & Steigelbauer, 1991; Sashkin & Egermeier, 1993; Massell & Hoppe, 1997; Ellsworth, 2000) and scores of anecdotal accounts bear out, making changes in public schools is often not easy. Yet, success stories abound, and many times these successes come when schools collaborate with an external change agent — a person or organization external to the school setting who helps a school navigate the road to improvement.

This *Noteworthy* details the framework that McREL uses to guide its actions when serving as a change agent to assist schools with their improvement efforts. The seeds for this framework, known as *Success in Sight*, were planted in the 1990s, as McREL worked with district and school staffs to help them implement standards-based education and fulfill its promise — high achievement for all students. *Success in Sight* differs from other comprehensive school reform efforts in that it also incorporates what McREL has learned from a series of three meta-analyses: (1) the effects of schooling on student achievement (*What Works in Schools*, Marzano, 2003), (2) the effects of instructional strategies on student achievement (*Classroom Instruction that Works*, Marzano, Pickering, & Pollack, 2001), and (3) the effects of principal leadership on student achievement (*School Leadership that Works: From Research to Results*, Marzano, Waters, & McNulty, 2005). As a result, *Success in Sight* reflects McREL's accumulated knowledge about the essential tasks that schools must undertake if they are to help all students become proficient in mathematics and reading by 2014.

These tasks are particularly daunting for chronically low-performing schools. *Success in Sight* is designed to help such schools not only meet the short-term challenges of the No Child Left Behind Act (NCLB), but develop the capacity to respond to future challenges by promoting shared leadership, development of a purposeful community, and the application of specific strategies for managing the differential impacts of change on members of the school community.

The remaining sections of this chapter detail the historical events that influenced *Success in Sight*, the theory of change and theory of action embedded in it, and the content that forms its core.

## THE HISTORY BEHIND *SUCCESS IN SIGHT*

By the late 1980s, bipartisan consensus resulted in a set of education goals to guide the overall course of education reform. At the Education Summit of 1989, President George H. Bush and the nation's governors agreed on broad goals for education. By the mid-1990's these broad goals were legislated in the Goals 2000: Educate America Act of 1994. These goals focused on school readiness, school completion, student achievement and citizenship, teacher education and professional development, mathematics and science, adult literacy and lifelong learning, safe and drug-free schools, and parent participation.

From the mid- to late 1990s, the Goals 2000 legislation, standards, and standards-based assessment began to drive state and district policy. Reflecting a growing body of research and the success of high-needs schools that took a systemic rather than piecemeal approach to improvement, the Goals 2000 legislation shifted the focus of Title I from "pull out programs" to school-wide programs. To encourage more low-performing schools to adopt comprehensive school reform programs based on reliable research and effective practices, the Comprehensive School Reform Demonstration program, known today as the Comprehensive School Reform (CSR) program, was initiated in 1997 with bipartisan Congressional support. Ushering in the most recent era of school reform, in 2001 President George W. Bush signed the No Child Left Behind Act into law. NCLB institutes stronger accountability for closing the achievement gap and increasing achievement for all students. It also provides more flexibility for states in how they use federal funds, emphasizes the use of scientifically research-based programs and practices, provides options for parents whose children attend schools that are chronically low performing, and requires that all teachers of core area subjects be "highly qualified" by the end of the 2005–2006 school year.

Since the inception of the CSR program, McREL has assisted states and districts across the Central Region to select and implement their chosen reform efforts. McREL has also worked with schools on developing and implementing standards, using research-based instructional strategies, and implementing a systemic approach to improvement. The *Success in Sight* process reflects this work and captures McREL's knowledge about what is needed to help schools become more effective.

It's obvious to schools that a number of changes are necessary on the journey from low performing to high performing. However, what is most important to change and how to change it are not always obvious to them. The following section provides an overview of McREL's theory of change and explains how *Success in Sight* draws on this model to weave a truly systemic, yet manageable reform process.

## MCREL'S THEORY OF CHANGE

Beginning with *A Nation At Risk's* dire warning about the state of the U.S. education system and moving through the implementation of content and performance standards, the Goals 2000 legislation, and Comprehensive School Reform (CSR), the United States has been on a steady march to improve school quality. Though these initiatives have differed in terms of scope and specifics, they have in common the overarching goal of bringing all students to high levels of academic achievement. In many schools, fundamental changes in knowledge, skills, and attitudes are necessary in order to move toward this goal.

How change happens in K–12 education settings has been a topic of interest and debate in the education community for decades. A number of theorists have examined change from different perspectives. Like a group of blind men trying to describe an elephant by examining different parts, each provides a description that makes sense given his view, but the true picture doesn't emerge until the various perspectives are integrated.

McREL believes that a systemic model of change is most appropriate for guiding school improvement. A systemic model of change is based on the recognition that the various "parts" or components of an education system are interrelated and that regardless of which part of the system is the focus of change, the whole system must continue to function. In devising its own theory of change, McREL has chosen to integrate a number of change theories (i.e., Bridges, 1991, 2003; Cuban, 1992, 1996, 1997; Fullan, 2001, 2002; Heifetz, 1994, 1997; Heifetz & Laurie, 1997; Lewin, 1951; Rogers, 1995, 2003) that, when integrated, reflect a systemic model of change.

> *The important thing is this: To be able at any moment to sacrifice what we are for what we could become.*
>
> *~Charles DuBois*

McREL's theory of change incorporates the idea that change is of different types. McREL uses the terms "first-order" and "second- order" to distinguish between those changes that are (1) an extension of past practice versus a break with past practice, (2) consistent versus inconsistent with prevailing organizational norms, (3) congruent versus incongruent with personal values, and (4) implemented with existing knowledge and skills versus requiring new knowledge and skills. These characteristics are provided in Exhibit 1.

McREL's theory of change also recognizes that the implications of change for those who will implement the change or be affected by it are as important as the type of change itself. We refer to this as the magnitude of change and speak of first-order implications and second-order implications of change. We believe that many change efforts fail because those leading the effort do not assess the magnitude of change for those involved and do not differentiate their approach accordingly. In other words, when people perceive that a change has second-, not first-, order implications,

**Exhibit 1. Characteristics of Change with First- and Second-Order Implications**

| First-Order Change | Second-Order Change |
|---|---|
| • An extension of the past | • A break with the past |
| • Consistent with prevailing organizational norms | • Inconsistent with prevailing organizational norms |
| • Congruent with personal values | • Incongruent with personal values |
| • Easily learned using existing knowledge and skills | • Requiring new knowledge and skills |

leaders must fulfill their leadership responsibilities in different ways.

Consider for example, that a school's staff decides to adopt a new mathematics textbook. If the approach used in the textbook is similar to the approach teachers have been using, if everyone agrees that this is the appropriate approach, and if teachers do not need to learn new ways of teaching to use the textbook, then most, if not all, of the school's staff will perceive the change as first-order. In other words, it is an extension of current practice, is consistent with prevailing organizational norms or what people value, and can be implemented with existing knowledge.

Suppose instead that the mathematics textbook being adopted takes an approach that is markedly different from the approach that most teachers use to teach mathematics in the school. For example, it might focus on problem solving rather than computation, require teachers to engage students in small group work rather than individual seat work, and involve students in multiple forms of assessment, including peer- and self-assessment throughout the unit, rather than limit assessment to multiple-choice questions at the end of the unit. This new approach might challenge some teachers' thinking about the teacher's role and the students' roles. It might require teachers to learn new ways of interacting with students and other teachers, designing lessons, asking questions, or explaining mathematics. Most teachers are likely to view this change as second-order. In other words, it is a break with current practice, conflicts with prevailing organizational norms, is inconsistent with what is valued, and requires significant new learning.

In sum, then, the comprehensive theory of change embedded in *Success in Sight* incorporates elements from a number of theories that relate to types of change and how people perceive change. It differs from other theories of change in its attention to first- and second-order implications of change in combination with its attention to the system as a whole.

## *SUCCESS IN SIGHT* THEORY OF ACTION

Improving schools is an undertaking that must be accomplished by the superintendent, district support staff, principal, and teachers working together. This notion of shared leadership is a key aspect of *Success in Sight's* theory of action. The approach develops the capacity of a school leadership team to create a school community that is able to accomplish the goal of improved student learning. This purposeful community must use all of its available resources effectively, establish and follow agreed-upon processes for making decisions and working toward goals, and believe in its collective ability to establish and accomplish goals that matter to all. As part of its work, the team must learn how to

- use data to understand their current reality and establish and monitor goals for improvement
- provide forums for discussing how to improve school-wide performance as well as individual student performance
- address an array of factors (e.g., instruction, classroom management, curriculum design, student motivation, student background knowledge) that affect student achievement

As the leadership team works with individual staff, it increases the capacity of the entire staff to improve instruction. This increased school-wide capacity and individual teacher capacity are mutually reinforcing. In short, *Success in Sight's* theory of action asserts that increasing teacher, school, and leadership capacity are essential to realizing increased student achievement (see sidebar).

## Developing School and Teacher Capacity

Research indicates that specific school, teacher, student (Marzano, 2003), and leadership (Marzano, Waters, & McNulty, 2005) practices are associated with high levels of student achievement. *Success in Sight* focuses on helping schools understand and address these practices as they develop and implement their improvement plans. Exhibits 2, 3, and 4 present the school, teacher, and student-level factors, along with sample leadership team actions that McREL might facilitate when working with schools on these factors. As part of the *Success in Sight* process, educators learn

### Definitions

**Leadership Capacity:** knowledge and skills to fulfill or support leadership responsibilities associated with high levels of student achievement, manage implications of change, establish and maintain a purposeful community, and determine a focus for improvement efforts.

**School Capacity:** collective ability to address the school-level, teacher-level, and student-level factors that are associated with high levels of student achievement and the ability to maintain a purposeful community.

**Teacher Capacity:** individual teacher's ability to help all students succeed, contribute to school-level efforts, and address the teacher-level and student-level factors that are associated with high levels of student achievement.

that as they implement these actions, they must continually evaluate their impact on student outcomes. It is not enough, for example, to simply put into place a parent involvement plan. The plan must be tied to observable outcomes; if those outcomes are not being met, revisions to the plan are in order.

### Exhibit 2: *Success in Sight* Sample Actions for School Factors Associated with Student Achievement

**Guaranteed & Viable Curriculum**: Teachers must address specific content in specific courses at specific grade levels, and this content can be adequately taught in the instructional time available to teachers.

Sample Actions:

- Defining the essential content that students are to learn
- Developing procedures and tools for monitoring the implementation of the essential curriculum, including how the curriculum is attained by different groups of students
- Developing policies and procedures for protecting the instructional time that is available

**Challenging Goals and Effective Feedback**: There are high expectations or “pressure” for all students to achieve. Academic goals are set for individual students and for the school as a whole. Student progress is systematically monitored and students receive feedback that is timely and specific to the content being learned.

Sample Actions:

Developing teachers’ assessment literacy and providing opportunities for teachers to collaboratively develop and score student assessments

Developing teachers’ ability to work with individual students (particularly those performing below the proficient level) to set specific, short-term goals related to specific topics within specific content areas

**Parent and Community Involvement**: Involvement of parents and the community at large can have a dramatic impact on student outcomes. Involvement includes (1) participation in the day-to-day activities of the school, (2) participation in decision making about school programs and practices related to student achievement, and (3) communication between home and school.

Sample Actions:

Developing and implementing a communication plan that makes information easily and readily available and includes multiple ways for the school to communicate with parents and the community

Creating structures (e.g., school improvement teams, site-based management teams) that involve parents in decision making in the school (e.g., establishing policies; planning, implementing, coordinating, or evaluating various school activities)

**Safe and Orderly Environment**: The school culture supports learning. It protects students from physical or psychological harm and maintains order.

Sample Actions:

Establishing rules and procedures that decrease the chance that the school's characteristics or routines will result in student behavior problems

Developing and communicating rules and procedures for general behavior (e.g., obscene language, truancy, fighting) in the school

Establishing and enforcing appropriate consequences for violations of school rules and procedures and examining the effectiveness of those consequences

**Collegiality and Professionalism**: Professional interactions among staff are guided by norms and contribute to a shared belief in their ability to effect change. Teacher learning addresses subject-matter and pedagogical knowledge.

Sample Actions:

Developing ways for teachers to be involved in making decisions about school-level policies

Developing and implementing staff development plans that involve teachers in activities that are focused on specific strategies for specific content areas, provide opportunities for teachers to apply what they have learned and receive feedback on their application of that knowledge, and form a coherent sequence of experiences that build on one another

Sources: *What Works in Schools* (Marzano, 2003), and *A New Era of School Reform* (Marzano, 2000).

### Exhibit 3: *Success in Sight* Sample Actions for Teacher Factors Associated with Student Achievement

| |
|---|
| **Instructional Strategies**: Teachers intentionally apply research-based instructional strategies throughout an instructional unit to maximize students' learning. |
| Sample Actions:<br>Assisting teachers to use a framework for designing units of instruction that incorporates research-based strategies and a variety of assessment methods<br>Providing information that helps teachers understand and use the nine categories of research-based instructional strategies associated with improved student achievement |
| **Classroom Management**: Teachers (1) establish and enforce rules and procedures, (2) carry out disciplinary actions, (3) maintain effective teacher and student relationships, and (4) maintain an appropriate mental set for management. |
| Sample Actions:<br>Using specific strategies (e.g., nonverbal disapproval, time out) that reinforce appropriate behavior and recognize and provide consequences for inappropriate behavior<br>Implementing a school-wide approach to discipline<br>Providing teachers with information about types of student behaviors (e.g., shyness, defiance), possible reasons for each type of behavior, and ways to address each of the behaviors |
| **Classroom Curriculum Design**: Teachers sequence and pace classroom learning experiences in ways that maximize student learning. |
| Sample Actions:<br>Discussing strategies for presenting new content in a variety of ways<br>Designing and using complex tasks that require students to defend and justify their conclusions<br>Designing and using formative and summative assessments that are aligned with the types of knowledge that students are learning |

**Exhibit 4: *Success in Sight* Sample Actions for Student Factors Associated with Student Achievement**

| |
|---|
| **Home Environment**: Home environment relates to (1) communication about school, (2) supervision, and (3) parental expectations and parenting styles. |
| Sample Actions:<br>Helping schools develop parent involvement plans<br>Providing training for teachers and parents on how parents can talk to their children about the value of school, encourage their academic progress, and provide resources for doing schoolwork; monitor and control their children's behavior that affects school work (e.g., time spent doing homework, time spent watching television); communicate high expectations for their children's academic success; and use an effective parenting style (authoritative) |
| **Learned Intelligence and Background Knowledge**: Learned intelligence refers to knowledge of facts, generalizations, and principles. Background knowledge is learned knowledge about a specific domain. |
| Sample Actions:<br>Developing a program of wide reading that also addresses vocabulary development<br>Developing a list of vocabulary terms and phrases for specific subject-matter areas and using a sequential process for teaching that vocabulary |
| **Motivation**: This practice relates to what drives students (striving for success vs. fear of failure), what they attribute success to (luck, effort, ability, task difficulty), their sense of self-worth, their emotions, and their deeply seated needs and aspirations. |
| Sample Actions:<br>Developing strategies for providing students with feedback on their knowledge gains<br>Developing strategies for teaching students about motivation and its effects on achievement |

## Developing Leadership Capacity

Few would deny that good leaders are critical for the success of school improvement efforts. As a result, developing the capacity of leaders, both principals and teachers, is an important part of the *Success in Sight* program. As a school progresses through the stages of *Success in Sight*, McREL staff help members of the leadership team learn how to establish and maintain a purposeful community and how to determine an appropriate focus for improvement efforts. Leadership team members also develop the capacity to manage the implications of change that improvement efforts will have for individuals and for the staff as a whole, and develop skills for addressing issues such as professional development and resource allocation.

This aspect of *Success in Sight* is based on McREL's experience working with leaders at all levels of the education system, an extensive review of the leadership literature, and a meta-analysis of principal leadership (*School Leadership that Works: From Research to Results*, Marzano, Waters, & McNulty, 2005). This meta-analysis demonstrated that principals do affect student achievement — the studies suggested that an increase of one standard deviation in a principal's leadership ability would lead to a 10 percentile point gain in average student achievement. The meta-analysis also identified 21 leadership responsibilities associated with high levels of student achievement and found a differential impact of principal leadership. In other words, strong leadership is not always associated with high student achievement. Leadership teams engaged in *Success in Sight* learn about these leadership responsibilities, how they are related to first- and second-order change, and how they can be shared between principals and teachers. They also learn how to focus on the "right things" (i.e., research-based factors associated with student achievement) and address the implications of change for those involved in the school's change initiatives. For example, Exhibit 5 illustrates actions that leadership teams can take during second-order change situations.

**Exhibit 5: Leadership Team Actions During Second-Order Change**

| Leadership Responsibility | Possible Team Actions |
|---|---|
| Culture | • Continually remind colleagues of the vision for the initiative and why it is important.<br>• Find points of agreement that can serve as "anchors" or "common ground" during the implementation of the innovation.<br>• In staff meetings, work in small groups, generating explicit ideas and connections regarding how the innovation can advance the shared vision of the school and how it fits the shared purpose.<br>• Provide differentiated support for teachers based on their responses to the initiative. |

| | |
|---|---|
| Communication | • Discuss disagreements and contentions in staff and team meetings.<br>• Probe for questions and concerns from colleagues and bring them to the leadership team for resolution.<br>• Create a unified front: agree upon a consistent and uniform message.<br>• Emphasize the fact that things will stabilize eventually as the innovation becomes better defined and "institutionalized." |
| Order | • Design effective decision-making procedures/problem-solving tools and conflict resolution tools.<br>• Model effective mediation strategies.<br>• Communicate the fact that the innovation will disrupt the established routine to some extent.<br>• Be consistent in those procedures that foster a sense of stability.<br>• Take an active role in creating and implementing operational procedures. |
| Input | • Actively seek input from staff.<br>• Work to develop "ownership" rather than "buy in" for the initiative.<br>• Work with the principal to offer multiple opportunities to discuss the innovation openly and honestly.<br>• Explicitly communicate the ways in which input informs decisions.<br>• Be transparent about the difference between decisions and input. |

Source: Waters, J. T., Marzano, R. J., & McNulty, B. A. (2003). *Balanced Leadership: What 30 years of reseach tells us about the effect of leadership on student achievement*. Aurora, CO: Mid-continent Research for Education and Learning.

Learning how to establish and maintain a purposeful community is essential for school leaders, and *Success in Sight* pays particular attention to this aspect of leadership development. The leadership team learns how to take stock of their assets and allocate them in ways that support the work that needs to be done to improve student learning. Team members also learn how to develop shared understanding of the school's purpose. In the process, they lead the staff in articulating behaviors that operationalize the staff's values and beliefs related to that purpose. The team also learns how to examine communication in the building and take actions to ensure that all staff not only have the information they need, when they need it, but also have opportunities to provide input and feedback related to the school's improvement efforts.

As teams work through the stages of *Success in Sight*, they develop agreed-upon processes for making decisions and carrying out actions in the school. These processes lead to a sense of order and discipline within the education community and contribute to staff members' sense of well being. In addition, they provide opportunities for shared leadership and foster productive relationships among community members and between the school and other critical institutions. As part of its leadership work, the team examines the implicit and explicit agreements that govern interactions in the school — particularly among the adults. They develop strategies to build trust and increase the level of honest and open communication.

## SUMMARY

Turning around a low-performing school requires both will and skill. The *Success in Sight* process helps schools develop both. Not overnight, but over time — through a six-stage process (see Exhibit 6) that is focused and deliberate. This process helps schools pay attention to what's important in improving student achievement and build capacity for the long term.

The *Success in Sight* process acknowledges the complexity of change and reform, but doesn't get bogged down in it.  It incorporates what is known about effective school improvement and leadership as well as the change process to help schools focus on the factors that affect student achievement, develop a purposeful community, and share leadership for improvement.

In chapters two through seven, we illustrate the six stages of *Success in Sight* by telling the story of a school involved in the improvement process. The school in the story is not a "real" school; it represents a composite of the schools McREL has worked with over the last five years. As the story illustrates, although there are specific actions to be taken within each stage of *Success in Sight*, the process is not linear. In other words, it is not necessary to complete one stage before moving to the next. For example, the story shows that teams begin to track their progress and think about maintaining momentum even as they launch the improvement plan. Too, the duration of each stage varies depending on a number of factors, including the culture of the school and the staff's experi-

Exhibit 6: Stages of *Success in Sight*

| Stage | Purpose |
|---|---|
| Stage 1<br>Getting Started | Characterize site and assess capacity to engage in school improvement. |
| Stage 2<br>Setting the Stage | Define the improvement effort, establish necessary resource commitments, and create a memorandum of understanding. |
| Stage 3<br>Developing the Plan | Determine an initial focus for the improvement effort and develop a plan to address the focus. |
| Stage 4<br>Launching the Plan | Build leadership capacity to manage and guide change, create infrastructure for continuous improvement, increase knowledge and skills related to the focus of change. |
| Stage 5<br>Tracking Progress | Collect and analyze formative and summative data about effectiveness of improvement efforts, make adjustments as needed, assess and revise monitoring and evaluation system. |
| Stage 6<br>Maintaining Momentum | Develop and implement plan for institutionalizing structures and processes to sustain improvement efforts. |

ence with change and school improvement processes.

The story is told from two perspectives: the members of the school staff (the principal and other members of the school leadership team) and the change agents (i.e., two members of McREL's staff). In addition to demonstrating the actions that the school takes, the narrative highlights the variety of roles that the change agent plays: catalyst, solution giver, process helper, and resource linker (Havelock & Zlotolow, 1995). The catalyst prods the system to help it overcome the inertia that keeps it from making necessary changes. The solution giver, or content expert, serves as a "surveyor of the larger landscape," making others aware of new ideas and stirring their interest in change. The process helper attends to all aspects of the change process, including evaluation, and focuses on helping others become problem solvers. The resource linker helps leadership teams find and make the best use of resources. The story shows that the role that the change agent plays depends on the needs of the site and the stage of the process.

Chapters 2–6 each include a tool and several tips that teams can use to accomplish some aspect of the work of the particular stage. Each chapter, also summarizes the actions that the change agent and the site take in that stage.

Getting started with improvement is often a difficult step for schools. Chapter 8 provides guidance for this step by highlighting the first stage of *Success in Sight*. The chapter presents questions that schools can use to determine if they have the critical elements needed to successfully engage in school improvement and sustain the effort. It includes suggested actions that schools can take to develop or strengthen these critical elements and that states and districts can take to support schools as they strive to help all students succeed.

# CHAPTER 2 Getting Started

Improving student achievement is an exercise in problem solving. A good problem solver knows the importance of understanding the problem before jumping to solutions. Stage 1 of *Success in Sight* helps the change agent and the educators at the site begin to understand the problem and determine the level of commitment to solving it. This stage involves sharing information and laying the foundation for the personal and professional relationships that are necessary to support the success of the improvement efforts to come.

During this “getting to know you” period, the change agent provides basic information about the *Success in Sight* approach, explaining that the approach provides opportunities for schools to learn what to do to improve student achievement, why to do it, how to do it, and when to do it. The school also gets to know *itself* during this stage. The local staff provide information that help the school and the change agent understand the nature and extent of current initiatives in the school, the stability of school leadership, and the resources (e.g., time set aside to meet in grade level teams, instructional coaches) available to support the hard work of school improvement. Much of this information is gathered through formal and informal conversation, although some data are collected through surveys, observations, and document reviews.

## TRUMAN ELEMENTARY SCHOOL’S JOURNEY: STAGE 1 OF *SUCCESS IN SIGHT*

The section that follows provides an example of how Stage 1 might unfold in a school from the perspective of the change agent and a school’s principal. This story is told with McREL in the role of change agent. The school in this story represents a composite of schools. The characters introduced in this stage include Sherri Trotter, principal of Truman Elementary School; Andrea Ornetti and Tom Neal, McREL field services staff; and Janet Walton, assistant superintendent for the district that includes Truman Elementary.

This chapter of the story explains how the school’s principal and staff began their work with McREL. It includes an explanation of how McREL staff learned about the school’s readiness for change and prepared for their first visit to the school.

### Making Initial Contact

Principal Sherri Trotter picked up the phone and hesitated for only a second before making the call to McREL. She had thought about this for some time and figured it was now or never. She had to admit that her school was stuck, after three years of a steady diet of school improvement plans, lots of staff development, and an infusion of additional funds. Her school's achievement profile had barely changed, and her staff members were beginning to grumble….more work each year, and not much to show for it. After all, with the unique challenges posed by her student population, what could they really hope to do? She knew that by the end of the summer the five or six teachers who wanted a return to a "traditional" school would be working hard to recruit allies on the staff. Sherri had already heard through the grapevine that their first action would be to request that recesses be eliminated! She wondered if she had the knowledge of school improvement and leadership that was necessary for moving the school forward. She knew, though, that another year of the same results might cause Truman to make the state's list of "schools failing to make AYP."

During the previous week, Sherri had attended an introductory session on McREL's *Classroom Instruction that Works* at a regional curriculum conference. She had been intrigued by the instructional strategies discussed, but was equally interested in the comments the presenter had made about a program that McREL was calling "*Success in Sight*." Sherri had wondered at the time if this program might help her own school, which was struggling with both reading and math achievement levels. Viewing the school as a "system" was something Sherri knew intuitively was a good idea, but there seemed to be so many competing commitments, and everyone had his or her own idea of what needed to be done.

McREL field services consultant Andrea Ornetti took the call, jotting down notes as Sherri explained the reasons for her call to McREL. Sherri described her arrival three years ago as the new principal of Harry S. Truman Elementary School. She was both excited and intrigued by the challenge she faced. Located in a small working-class suburb of a medium-sized Midwest city, Truman had a long and proud tradition as a neighborhood school. But things were changing, and Sherri knew that these changes were compromising the effectiveness of the instruction at her school. A few of the new families didn't speak English, and jobs weren't as plentiful in the local factories as they used to be. In fact, many families were headed by single parents who sometimes seemed too busy to really care about the school. And there were so many students with disabilities. The teachers weren't used to this, and the number of special education referrals was skyrocketing. Although the teachers cared deeply about the students, their classroom successes seemed to be more and more frequently based on helping children manage their emotional needs rather than their academic achievement.

Andrea listened carefully to Sherri. She was curious about Truman Elementary's improvement plan, and when she asked, Sherri explained that the plan was quite complex and had taken a lot of time to write. Sherri and her colleagues had been careful to include all of the plan requirements enumerated by the district and the state, including staff development planning, areas of responsibility, deadlines, improvement strategies, data analysis, and program analysis. Sherri admitted that she didn't really know whether the plan was truly helpful, or how much teachers were using the plan to inform their work. She mentioned that the district administrators took the building plans quite seriously and each year checked carefully to make sure that various components were included in the plan. Last year her team had rewritten the plan several times in order to meet all of the district's guidelines for quality school improvement plans.

Andrea also asked what leadership structures were in place at Truman Elementary. Sherri explained that because of budget cuts she no longer had an assistant principal, but that she had a group of teachers who sometimes advised her on an informal basis when she had a difficult decision to make. Sherri asked Andrea if McREL recommended a formal leadership team to the schools they worked with. Andrea answered yes, and suggested to Sherri that before they go much further, they set up an appointment during which they could speak in person. Andrea also suggested that they exchange some basic information to learn more about each others' work.

As she hung up the phone, Sherri's mind was racing. She was sure she had heard correctly — Andrea had said that yes, other schools with student populations similar to hers had "turned the corner" and become "high achieving." And Andrea had responded positively to her questions about special education students meeting standards. Still, Sherri wondered if working with an outside agency was the right use of her resources. When she thought about all of the money already spent on staff development with little change in results, she felt better. If McREL's strategies worked, it might not be expensive at all.

## Exchanging Information

That afternoon, Andrea emailed Sherri a brochure that explained the six stages of *Success in Sight*. Sherri was pleased to see that the explanation of the stages also described the responsibilities of the school in the improvement process and that many of the actions were ones that Truman had already begun working on.

In return, Sherri sent Andrea a three-page summary detailing the faculty and student demographics of Truman Elementary School, scores from the prior year's state assessments, and a copy of the school improvement plan. She also included the results of her work with the staff on developing a shared vision and a statement of purpose, and suggested potential meeting dates.

Andrea confirmed the meeting, noting that she would bring a colleague from McREL and suggesting that Sherri invite two or three teachers to join them.

Sherri wondered who she should ask to accompany her to the meeting. Andrea hadn't said whether to bring skeptics or supporters. She called two of her staff members who she thought were looked up to by the staff — one who had been sympathetic to her leadership initiatives, and another who kept her opinions somewhat to herself, but who enjoyed great credibility with the staff as a superior teacher. They both agreed to attend the meeting. Even though Sherri would be using building funds exclusively for this project, Andrea had suggested keeping the district office informed and involved, to take advantage of any support they might provide. Sherri called the assistant superintendent, Janet Walton, to explain her plans to work with McREL and invite her to attend the meeting.

Sherri also sent an email to her staff, letting her teachers know that they would be contacted by McREL to answer a few simple questions regarding their work. In the email, Sherri expressed excitement about the potential for the work and asked teachers to keep an open mind about this possible new project.

Meanwhile, in McREL's offices, Andrea was reviewing the materials she used when she began working with a new school. She selected questions for the interviews and questionnaire, designed to gather more information about Truman's readiness to take on the hard work of improvement. Several of these questions would provide valuable insight into how Truman teachers felt about their individual and collective ability to help their students succeed — feelings that are critically related to a school's ability to improve. Once Andrea completed the electronic questionnaire, she emailed Sherri with access instructions, guidance on how to explain the purpose of the questionnaire to the teachers, and ways to assure teachers that their responses would be anonymous. She also asked Sherri to select several teachers for her to interview, choosing from across grade levels, experience levels, and interest levels in school improvement.

## Preparing for the First Visit

Over the next few weeks, Andrea and her colleague, Tom Neal, conducted the phone interviews, analyzed the questionnaire responses from the teachers, and reviewed the demographic and student achievement data that Sherri had provided. Andrea and Tom organized the information into a preliminary site description and used a readiness rubric (see Exhibit 7) to make a judgment about the school's readiness to engage in school improvement. At the same time, she thought about Sherri's responses to her questions. Sherri seemed like a positive leader, someone who would be receptive to *Success in Sight* but who also had a good understanding of her own school's unique context.

***TIP:*** *When possible, change agents should meet on site with staff members to gather information in person and allow staff members the opportunity to get to know them.*

The week before the site visit, Andrea and Tom met to make final plans for the initial meeting with Truman. They discussed the report they would provide to Sherri and her team, developed an agenda and handouts for the meeting, and agreed on roles for each attendee. Andrea emailed the agenda to Sherri and followed up with a phone call to ensure that everything was in order for the meeting the following week.

## SUMMARY OF ACTIONS

During Stage 1, McREL staff provide a brief overview of the *Success in Sight* program, including a general description of the intervention and intended outcomes, the role of McREL in the school improvement process, and the role of the school. McREL field services staff conduct interviews and survey school leaders and other staff to gather information about the local context, system alignment, and readiness to engage in improvement efforts. McREL staff then prepare a site report based on data provided by the school.

School actions during Stage 1 include providing documents and other data that describe the site context, its readiness to engage in improvement, and its system alignment. School staff participate in interviews and respond to questionnaires, and the site convenes key leaders who will be involved in the effort.

***TIP:*** *Change agents should avoid overwhelming the site with information requests. They should be strategic about the types of information they request and keep the format of data collection instruments as simple as possible.*

## TOOL FOR STAGE 1: READINESS FOR IMPROVEMENT INVENTORY

No two schools are alike. Each comes to the task of school improvement with different experiences with change and different levels of expertise in using data and a host of other skills necessary to improve student achievement. Change agents can use the Readiness for Improvement Inventory (see Exhibit 7) to get a sense of a school's capacity for change and to make a preliminary judgment about where to focus initial work with the school. This inventory focuses primarily on attitudes that are necessary to sustain involvement with school improvement. Schools might find it helpful to use the readiness inventory before engaging in any change effort, regardless of whether they work with an outside change agent.

### Exhibit 7: Readiness for Improvement Inventory

| Check if Present | Indicator | Comments |
|---|---|---|
| | Staff members recognize a need for improvement. | |
| | There is a core group of individuals who are open to considering new ways of operating and are willing to put forth the energy to lead change. | |
| | The principal is willing to support change efforts and reflect on his/her own practice. | |
| | Staff feel empowered or have sufficient district support to reallocate resources (including time) to support school improvement efforts. | |
| | Staff members are willing to accept outside assistance. | |
| | The improvement effort will complement initiatives in progress. | |

# CHAPTER 3 Setting the Stage

Stage 2 of *Success in Sight* involves making decisions: What are some possible starting points for the work? What will be the focus of the work? What strengths or current initiatives can be leveraged to get the work off the ground? What roles and responsibilities will each group assume? What commitments will be necessary to get the work done?

To help answer these questions, the change agent and site leaders discuss McREL's analysis of the site's readiness to engage in change and collaboratively decide upon the intensity and content of the work. This stage establishes how the work will progress — with a focus on data-driven decision making and collaborative work. The change agent emphasizes that although there will be some immediate observable successes as a result of the work, the program should not be viewed as a "quick fix" focused only on improving test scores. Rather, it is a systemic — and systematic — effort to build the school's capacity to identify and meet challenges to sustaining improvement. There is a strong emphasis on open communication during this stage. During this stage, the change agent and site leaders talk about the commitments of time, money, and effort that will be needed to ensure the success of the project and they document these agreements by signing a memorandum of understanding. It's now time for the real work to begin!

## TRUMAN ELEMENTARY SCHOOL'S JOURNEY: STAGE 2 OF *SUCCESS IN SIGHT*

In this chapter of Truman's experience with *Success in Sight*, the Truman leadership team meets with McREL staff to review information gathered during Stage 1. Discussions center on the resource and other commitments that will be needed to support the improvement initiative. To round out this stage, the school and McREL formalize their agreement to work together.

***TIP:*** *Keep central office administrators apprised of both the content and the progress of the improvement efforts at the school, and discuss with district personnel the ways in which new district initiatives may affect the school's efforts.*

### Meeting to Review Initial Report

Just three weeks after Sherri's initial call to McREL, Truman's ad hoc leadership team met with McREL staff to review the information gathered during Stage 1 and to decide whether or not to move ahead with the work. The Truman teachers were eager to hear McREL's preliminary findings and were curious about what recommendations they might make regarding the possible nature and scope of the work.

Andrea and Tom began with a review of their findings. Andrea distributed a summary of the results of the questionnaire completed by Truman staff, and asked Sherri and her colleagues to comment on areas they felt were significant. Sherri noted that many teachers seemed to feel that the school improvement plan might be irrelevant to their work. Others pointed out that the staff seemed to feel discouraged about their ability to make a difference in student achievement. Several teachers expressed the idea that everyone was already doing the best that they possibly could. Everyone present agreed that the questionnaire responses seemed to indicate the lack of a common focus around the work that they should be doing.

**Collective Efficacy**
*"Collective efficacy refers to the perceptions of teachers in a school that the faculty as a whole can execute the courses of action necessary to have positive effects on students." Goddard, 2001 (p. 467)*

The leadership team and the McREL representatives spent a significant amount of time discussing the questionnaire and exchanging ideas about the implications of the various findings. Tom and Andrea distributed an outline of additional findings generated through their analysis of Truman's data and the school improvement plan. Several of these preliminary findings focused on the idea of collective efficacy (see sidebar). Andrea and Tom had agreed before the meeting that surfacing such beliefs would be an important part of their work at Truman. They had helped other schools address collective efficacy, and it had had a powerful effect on teachers' thinking about their individual teaching and their work with colleagues.

Andrea spent a few minutes defining the concept for the group and providing background information. She wondered aloud how the teachers at Truman would define the barriers to increased student achievement. She silently speculated whether the teachers at Truman truly believed they could make a difference, or if they felt that student achievement was based on factors beyond their control. Andrea and Tom urged the team to think about their faculty in terms of collective efficacy and to consider how the concept might play out in the leadership team.

Sherri also wondered to herself whether Truman's teachers really did believe they could make a difference. If not, all the school improvement plans in the world probably wouldn't matter. Speaking of which….Andrea had mentioned that she would help Sherri and the staff simplify their plan and turn it into a more useable document. Imagine that, the plans coming off the shelf and actually being used!

Andrea and Tom also discussed other potential areas of focus that they thought might be appropriate for their work with

Truman: the development of team leadership skills, creation of a system for generating and monitoring shared agreements around instruction, and the introduction of new classroom instructional practices. They reassured the group that these were areas that would be worked on over time; that they would start small and build on the team's successes along the way. The team members seemed relieved that they weren't expected to accomplish everything in six months.

Tom and Andrea noted that Sherri and the teachers seemed concerned about the amount of resources they would have to commit to the project, as they frequently asked questions about the cost. Sherri also wanted to know what her role would be in the upcoming work and what commitments she might need to make to McREL. Would there be additional expenses involved in these new improvement efforts? Tom and Andrea asked Sherri to follow up with the leadership team when necessary, and to provide substitute teachers for the leadership team during their regular meetings. Sherri also agreed to provide time at staff meetings for the team to report back to the staff, solicit additional ideas and expertise from them, and to assist in shifting resources within the school to improve student achievement.

***TIP:*** *Consider the entire range of resources available that will help ensure long-term success. In addition to money, resources include time and people/expertise.*

Time was another concern. One teacher said he thought it might cause problems in his classroom if he had to spend time attending leadership team meetings during the school day. Another nodded her head in agreement, adding that her students seldom did well when she was gone from the classroom. Tom used examples from his work with other schools to paint an exciting picture of increased student success, and all of the Truman representatives agreed to give it a try. They understood the importance of taking time to carefully plan and coordinate the work, yet they could not help feeling anxious about the time out of the classroom. Finding the right balance to ensure the maximum benefit would be a challenge, but the group agreed to move forward, periodically reflect on whether they were striking the right balance, and make adjustments if needed.

Glancing at the clock, Sherri noticed that the agreed-upon ending time for the meeting was fast approaching. She mentioned that she felt the group was close to an agreement to continue the work with McREL and asked if others felt the same. The group members agreed, and Sherri proposed that she and Janet negotiate a final description of the work with McREL and begin building a more permanent school leadership team. The group gave their go-ahead, and Sherri, Janet, Tom, and Andrea scheduled an additional meeting to finalize the scope and nature of the work.

In large part due to the amount of information shared at the meeting, Sherri felt confident that she had a good idea of how the work might proceed. She stayed a few minutes afterwards with Janet, and they agreed that working with McREL offered a new opportunity for Truman and that the proposed nature and scope of the work accurately addressed the needs expressed in the teacher interviews and surveys. Janet agreed to report the results of the meeting to the superintendent for informational purposes and encouraged Sherri to continue her work with McREL. She also offered assistance from the district perspective in supporting the work that Sherri was proposing.

## Formalizing the Agreement to Work Together

Based on the discussions at Truman, Andrea drew up a brief memorandum of understanding. The agreement detailed the responsibilities of each partner: McREL's representatives would meet with the leadership team for a half day per month over the next three years and provide training in leadership, group facilitation, data analysis, goal setting, and systemic improvement. They also would consult with Sherri and Janet in advance of all meetings, as well as involve them in the planning process. In addition, McREL staff would work with the principal for two hours a month in a personal "coaching" arrangement (see sidebar for a description of coaching), with the goal of increasing her knowledge of research-based leadership practices and assisting her in gaining new data regarding her performance as principal. They also pledged to help her learn how to take a "balcony view" so that she would be more aware of the overall impact of her actions and options as a school leader.

**Purposeful Community**
*A purposeful community is one with the collective efficacy and capability to develop and use assets to accomplish purposes and produce outcomes that matter to all community members through agreed-upon processes.*

**Coaching**
*Coaches assist school leaders in seeing situations "with a new set of eyes" and in a way that may allow them additional insight into their work. They assist school leaders in gaining new knowledge about their situations, personal attributes and characteristics, and in applying their knowledge to their work.*

For Truman's part, Sherri agreed to provide released time for the leadership team each month, as well as time at faculty meetings for the team to communicate with the staff and to conduct any necessary activities involving the staff as a whole. Acknowledging the need for additional professional development, Sherri also agreed to hold a two-day retreat with the leadership team and McREL prior to each school year, align professional development at the school with the school improvement plan and the work of the leadership team, and allocate resources to support the necessary professional development.

The agreement also included a statement of the broad outcomes of the work, which consisted of developing a purposeful community (see sidebar on page 24), increasing staff capacity to engage in school improvement, and improving student achievement.

Tom, Andrea, Sherri, and Janet signed the memorandum of understanding as an official record of their agreement to work together. Sherri talked about the relationship with McREL at her next staff meeting and distributed a copy of the agreement to everyone. Although at first she had felt it wasn't necessary to create the memorandum, she was now beginning to think it might serve as a symbol of the importance of the work.

## SUMMARY OF ACTIONS

During Stage 2, McREL field services staff determine possible options for the scope of work by identifying the parts of the system that need to be addressed; reviewing the school's capacity and readiness for change; identifying possible entry points based on data collected in Stage 1; and gauging the level of site resources available for the effort.

McREL staff then facilitate an exchange of perceptions, ideas, and information regarding potential scope of work with the site and explore options for the focus of the work. McREL provides the school with feedback (written or oral) from the analysis of data gathered during Stage 1 and with recommendations for the scope of work, including potential entry points. After McREL staff and school staff collaboratively determine the nature and scope of the work, they discuss the commitments the site needs to make to ensure short- and long-term success, and clarify the expectations, roles, and responsibilities of both the school and McREL. These expectations, roles, and responsibilities are formalized in a memorandum of understanding and/or contract.

***TIP:*** *Create a visual representation of the change process the site will undertake, to provide a common framework from which to have ongoing discussions about how activities fit within the larger context and each individual's role in the change process.*

## TOOL FOR STAGE 2: THE BEGINNING SCHOOL IMPROVEMENT: RESOURCE CONSIDERATIONS WORKSHEET

The Beginning School Improvement: Resource Considerations Worksheet (see Exhibit 8) is used by the change agent in collaboration with the school to assess the level of resources available to support the work of the leadership team. This worksheet helps the school take stock of resources and begin to understand the ways in which resources can be used to ensure that the work is successful.

**Exhibit 8: Beginning School Improvement: Resource Considerations**

What support is available for leadership team meetings?

____ The team will have a regularly scheduled time to meet.
_____ Substitute teachers will be available to cover team members' duties, instructional and otherwise, in their absence.
_____ Other professional staff will be available to attend meetings as needed.
_____ There are comfortable facilities in which to meet.

Are funds available to support the needs of the team?

_____ Released time
_____ Materials
_____ Professional development

Where might those resources come from?

_____ Special district assistance
_____ Local grants
_____ Title 2
_____ School-wide
_____ Community or education foundation
_____ State department of education
_____ Use of internal expertise
_____ Time reallocation

What time is available for all teachers to collaborate around improved student achievement?

_____ Common planning time for grade level or content area teams (minutes per week? ____ )
_____ Regularly scheduled time before or after school (minutes per week? ____ )
_____ Regularly scheduled time during staff meetings (minutes per week? ____ )

What leadership capacity exists?

_____ The principal will attend the leadership team and collaborative meetings.
_____ The principal will provide leadership for the team between meetings.
_____ Teachers will join in taking responsibility for team leadership.
_____ District administrators will assist the team in its work.

How will professional development contribute to the effort?

_____ Professional development is part of the culture of the school and/or school district.
_____ There is a structure for accessing professional development opportunities.
_____ The school has the ability to determine its own staff development needs.

# CHAPTER 4 Developing the Plan

In Stage 3, McREL staff and the leadership team establish the actions to be taken and ensure that there are structures to support the work. First and foremost, if there is no site leadership team, one is formed and begins to meet on a regular basis. The change agent provides an overview of the factors that affect student achievement (e.g., guaranteed and viable curriculum) and assists the team in reviewing data to determine the school's strengths and needs in relation to these factors. The team uses this information to prioritize their improvement initiatives, choosing an initial focus for their work, establishing goals for improvement related to that focus, and identifying strategies for accomplishing those goals. They develop a timeline for activities to put the strategies into action and monitor how often and how well those strategies are being used. This means that they establish checkpoints for collecting and analyzing data, define measures and expected progress at these checkpoints, and identify data sources. The plan also outlines how data will be collected, analyzed, reported, and used to make adjustments.

## TRUMAN ELEMENTARY SCHOOL'S JOURNEY: STAGE 3 OF *SUCCESS IN SIGHT*

Checking in with Truman Elementary School during Stage 3, we see that the focus is on forming a representative school leadership team and narrowing the focus for the team's work. The team gains experience with the change process by designing, implementing, and evaluating a "small-scale" change initiative. Building on this successful experience, they revisit their school improvement plan and select a focus to continue their improvement efforts.

***TIP:*** *When forming a leadership team, it is important to include diverse views and to have the "right people at the table" to get the job done.*

### Getting the Leadership Team Up and Running

With Andrea's assistance, Sherri began putting together a full fledged school leadership team, taking care to add members who represent various viewpoints among the school's teachers. The final team consisted of the school counselor (representing specialists), the Title One teacher (representing all teachers who give special help to students), and teacher representatives from grades K–1, 2–3, and 4–5. After careful consideration, Sherri decided not to add parents or non-teaching staff to the committee at this time, feeling that the leadership team should focus primarily on teaching and leadership practices. Andrea mentioned that the team would quickly learn new strategies for bringing people on board to provide additional expertise, involvement, and problem solving skills. Andrea and Sherri agreed upon a skeleton agenda for the organizational meeting and carefully selected a comfortable venue for the first meeting of the team.

At the organizational meeting of the team, Andrea and Sherri "tag teamed" in explaining the mission of the leadership team and the role that it could play in school improvement. The team reviewed the stages of *Success in Sight* and the outcomes agreed upon in the memorandum of understanding. The team also discussed some of the challenges they thought they would face, and Andrea relayed some of the experiences she had had in assisting leadership teams in other schools. She also provided some ideas for beginning the critical process of leadership team/staff communication.

The group spent some time discussing the norms of behavior under which the group would work. They chose to adopt the norms that were used by the faculty in their regular meetings: be brief and to the point, keep an open mind, listen without bias, respect other opinions, avoid side conversations, and come prepared to do what is in the best interest of children. At Andrea's suggestion, they added that all parties would be responsible for monitoring the adherence of group members to the norms.

**"Traditional" Aspects of School Culture**

- "Private" practice – Teachers operate independently, without formal opportunities to share information about teaching strategies and use data to compare the effectiveness of different strategies.
- Input driven – Teachers select units of instruction based on a textbook or personal preference rather than on an agreed-upon set of learning targets (i.e., standards).
- Teacher isolation – Schools are organized in ways that make it difficult for teachers to interact during the day. This organization affects beliefs and practices related to resource allocation, teaching, and learning.
- Change without results – Schools engage in change initiatives but these changes are often too far removed from the core work of schools, lack appropriate support, or are abandoned too soon to result in significant increases in student achievement for many students.
- Trait theory of teachers – This view downplays the "science" part of teaching and promotes the ideas that teaching is an art and good teachers are "born not made."

As the team discussed the difficulty of getting a group of teachers "on the same page," Andrea initiated a discussion of school culture and some of its traditional aspects (see sidebar). Both Sherri and Andrea noticed several teachers nodding in agreement. Andrea stressed that transforming the culture at Truman would be a continuing priority for the team and would require constant attention and communication. She reminded the team that this priority was captured in the memorandum of understanding by the purposeful community goal.

***TIP:*** *Meeting off-site can often provide a boost for the team. Consider the board room of a local bank or business, or an academic setting such as the meeting room in the library of a local university. Special food can often help take the meeting "beyond the ordinary."*

Sherri initiated a discussion of the current school improvement plan and Andrea asked the teachers why the plan did not seem to be in use in the building. After an uncomfortable silence, one of the teachers said, "I don't think teachers thought it was mandatory." Another said, "Most of us weren't involved in writing it, so we didn't think it applied to us. I don't think I even have a copy." Other comments made it clear that even teachers who knew about the plan didn't consider it very important in the daily life of the school.

Andrea made a mental note about the difficulty the teachers had in bringing up their concerns. Was it the result of inexperience in being honest and forthright? Or, were there factors that made it too risky to bring up opinions that could be perceived as in opposition to those held by Sherri? She made a mental note to mention it to Tom so he might discuss it with Sherri during one of their coaching sessions.

Andrea led the team in an activity that helped them examine their school improvement plan in relationship to a set of criteria for effective plans. As the team examined their plan, some members wondered why particular strategies had been selected and others questioned whether there were too many strategies. Tom and Andrea knew that many schools developed improvement plans that included a "laundry list" of strategies and that without a more focused approach, little would change. Their goal for this meeting with the Truman team had been to raise the question of focus. From the comments they heard, Tom and Andrea felt the team had gotten the message.

Sherri reminded the team that the memorandum of understanding with McREL stated that the team would meet twice per month, once with McREL staff present and once on its own. She asked if others agreed that they needed to spend more time reviewing the strategies in the plan and thinking about where they wanted to focus their time and efforts. Everyone agreed.

As the meeting neared its ending time,

Andrea asked members to reflect on the meeting and their observations and thoughts. Two teachers wondered if the new team would have any real "power." Tom and Andrea had discussed the idea of shared leadership with Sherri, so she was able to agree that all decisions affecting student learning at Truman would be open to discussion and decision by the group, as long as decisions were made with the primary criteria being "in the best interests of improving student learning." She further stated her belief that the best decisions were made with lots of input from staff and that she would be learning along with the rest of the team.

> ***TIP:*** *Encourage the team to communicate with the rest of the staff about the team's work. Provide a template for reporting on the meeting or examples of other teams' notes that have been shared with staff not on the leadership team. This minimizes the probability that staff not on the team will view the team as "special" or their work as "secret."*

The team members seemed somewhat surprised and impressed by this commitment to shared leadership, and agreed that this understanding could provide a solid foundation for working together in the future. The counselor and the third grade representative offered to write up this agreement for future reference. Sherri felt very positive about having the assistance of a leadership team and the ability to make decisions based on input from many sources. She also knew from her conversations with Andrea and Tom that involving teachers in school decisions is a powerful way to build collective efficacy.

As the meeting was wrapping up, Andrea told the group that she would write up notes from the meeting and distribute them to the group. She asked if someone wanted to volunteer to be the note taker at future meetings. No one seemed eager to take on the task.

After the leadership team members went back to their classes, Andrea and Sherri discussed preliminary plans for the leadership team meeting that would occur before Andrea returned the next month. Sherri agreed to call Andrea after that meeting so they could make plans for Andrea's next visit. Andrea and Sherri were pleased with the way the first meeting had gone and felt the team was off to a good start.

The next week, Tom and Sherri met for her first coaching session. Tom began by explaining McREL's coaching model and demonstrating to Sherri how she could use McREL's online instrument to collect data regarding teachers' perceptions of her leadership. They spent the remainder of the first session getting to know each other better, and agreed to talk again after Andrea's next visit.

## Getting Down to Work

When Andrea called to discuss plans for the next meeting, Sherri expressed her disappointment with the meeting the team held on its own. Several members had shown up late, and others had left early. They didn't seem to be as excited about the work as they had been when Andrea was there, and they still weren't clear about where to focus — all of the strategies seemed important. Andrea reassured Sherri that this was not unusual and that she had strategies for helping the team past this hurdle. They agreed to focus the second meeting on one area that needed improvement and to structure conversations around how to launch a small improvement initiative in that area. Andrea also suggested that they begin the work on collective efficacy by considering, as a team, exactly what factors they could or could not control or influence.

***TIP:*** *To help reduce staff anxiety about taking time for the leadership team to meet, use structures and processes (e.g., agendas, norms, facilitators, note takers) to work efficiently and effectively during the time allotted. If the team collectively defines agenda items based on issues that are important to them and other staff members and are able to make progress in those areas, they will be willing to make some sacrifices in instructional time.*

Andrea began the next meeting by leading the team members in an exercise in which they listed barriers to student achievement at Truman. After the list was compiled, the team decided which of the barriers they could control, which they could influence, and which they could do nothing about.

Sherri was surprised by the outcome of this activity. It seemed clear that the staff at Truman was expending a great deal of energy wrestling with factors that were out of their control! And when they looked at which of their actions might have the greatest return, it was obvious that improvement in classroom instructional techniques was within their sphere of influence and had the potential to provide significant increases in student achievement.

One of the teachers suggested that they go back to the school improvement plan and see how many of their strategies were directly related to instructional techniques. The team divided into groups of three for this activity, with each group tackling a different section of the plan. Andrea suggested that they also think about the range of strategies in the plan and whether there was evidence that teachers were using the strategies and that the strategies were effective. When the small groups reported the results of their deliberations, it became clear that there was a wealth of student achievement data, but a distinct lack of data regarding the specific teaching strategies that teachers were using.

Andrea knew that the district was providing professional development on using data but that only the principal and a few teachers in each building were being trained initially. Only one of these teachers at Truman was on the leadership team. Andrea decided to talk more with Sherri about building the leadership team's data skills use. She knew they would need to understand how to collect, analyze, and use data to move the improvement work forward. She made a note to herself to think about whether the next session might be a good time to formally introduce the data cycle. For now, she would encourage the team to collect some data about instructional strategies currently in use at Truman. With some prompting from Andrea, the team agreed that a subgroup of the team, along with a small group of other interested teachers, would design a staff survey to gather information about which instructional strategies were being used at Truman.

Shortly after this meeting, Tom held a second coaching session with Sherri. This time he felt comfortable asking Sherri if she had noticed the teachers' hesitancy in bringing up difficult issues. Sherri acknowledged that the Truman teachers were hesitant and explained that bringing up difficult issues was not traditionally part of the culture at Truman. In fact, the last principal specifically asked people NOT to bring up issues. He had felt they should solve them individually or in small groups! Tom asked Sherri if she had addressed this particular issue with the staff. When she replied that she hadn't, they spent the remainder of the session discussing the implications of this characteristic of Truman's culture and how Sherri might address this important issue. Sherri found it helpful to review the list of 21 leadership responsibilities associated with student achievement that McREL had identified through its research on principal leadership. As she and Tom discussed the list, she brainstormed some ways she might focus on a few of the responsibilities over the next month. She settled on two: flexibility and communication. Sherri thought that by asking staff to read and discuss articles about how others had addressed some of the difficult issues facing Truman, she would encourage staff to express diverse opinions and provide opportunities for staff to communicate with one another. Sherri and Tom agreed to continue the discussion of the responsibilities at their next coaching session.

## Experiencing the Process on a Small Scale

When Andrea returned the following month, the team was excited to talk about the results of the instructional audit. They were surprised that the survey revealed that most teachers used a very limited set of instructional strategies, particularly in reading and mathematics, and that they used only a few of the strategies in the school improvement plan. The team recorded these observations along with other statements that the team agreed represented a fair interpretation of the data.

At this point, Andrea brought up the idea of implementing a small, manageable improvement project. This small piece of work would serve several purposes for the leadership team as well as for the McREL consultants. It would offer the chance for the leadership team to participate in a "mastery experience," one that would show the value of working together toward a common goal, and using common strategies and indicators of success. In carrying through this small piece of work from start to finish, the school would begin a cycle of increasing collective efficacy through mastering increasingly complex levels of work.

The small piece of work also serves as a training opportunity for the use of strategies for running meetings, determining agendas, building norms, and developing agreed-upon processes for doing the important work of school improvement. And because this initial piece of work is small and manageable, it provides a "holding environment" — a relatively risk-free environment in which potentially difficult situations and work can take place without personal animosity or recrimination.

Andrea explained that the reason for beginning with a small piece of work, or "fractal" experience, is to help the team experience all the phases of change without much risk. In other words, all of the procedural skills necessary for school improvement are present in the fractal experience, but the problem and solution are not so complex that the team will become overwhelmed before they experience success. She added that this initial fractal experience would serve as a lens or framework that will help the team be clear, intentional, and open about its work. This "lens" will assist the team in making judgments from the beginning about the quality of its work, giving it both processes and language to describe the way the team is working together and evaluating its own learning.

Andrea emphasized that this ability to see itself clearly would help the team keep its eye on the larger vision and would be fundamental to sustaining improvement efforts after McREL leaves the scene. She added that McREL's long term goal is for the entire school staff to be able to work together to tackle complex challenges. In order to do that, there must be a common understanding of the work they need to do, the methods they will use to do it, and the way they will interact to accomplish the work. At that point, the school will be functioning as a purposeful community and learning organization.

Team members asked what might be appropriate for their fractal experience. Andrea mentioned that in her review of the school improvement plan she had noticed a schoolwide goal regarding problem solving in math. She asked the group to think about some possible reasons for student difficulties with problem solving. One teacher said, "I think students don't understand the problems because they don't know the meaning of the math terms used in them."

**The Fractal Experience**

"Fractal" is a geometric term that refers to a pattern that is reproducible at any magnification or reduction within the whole. McREL uses the term "fractal experience" to describe a small, carefully designed improvement experience that serves a dual purpose: to teach improvement processes to be used throughout the organization; and to begin to build collective efficacy on the part of the teaching staff.

Another thought students made too many computation mistakes. Andrea mentioned that during the initial interviews, several teachers had commented that "students don't know the facts like they used to." Andrea wondered aloud if others shared this concern.

As group members nodded in agreement, Andrea introduced the possibility of the teachers working together, on a whole staff basis, on the short–term goal of students mastering math facts. She and Tom suggested that the team collect some quick data around how many children had mastered the facts that were required at their level. The team agreed that if the results showed that a significant number of students did not know their math facts, they would ask a group of teachers with strengths in math instruction to develop a series of easily implemented interventions.

When the data came back, no one was surprised. Less than 50 percent of the students had learned the math facts that were expected of them at their level. The team developing interventions to address the problem presented this list at the next team meeting:

- Provide a list and a short training regarding differentiated instructional strategies that teachers can use while working with their students on math facts.

- Have each teacher review the learning objective (facts to be learned) with their students and consider ways in which students might track their own progress.

- Have each teacher devote fifteen minutes per day to practicing the facts and assessing students' progress.

- Ask teachers to send a note to parents that explains which facts students need to learn and asks parents to assist their children in meeting the learning goals (parents will be asked to sign a form indicating their agreement to help their child).

- Agree that in four weeks each teacher will re-assess their students.

- Agree that at the end of the four week period, each grade level will establish a mandatory after-lunch "club" (in place of recess) for students who had not passed the assessment. Sherri will be the club "sponsor." Students can leave the club after they have shown mastery of the facts.

Members of the leadership team discussed ways to generate enthusiasm for the initiative and get agreement from teachers regarding participation. Team members were reasonably certain that faculty members would support an initiative if all participated, and so decided that they would survey teachers, on a-one to one basis, about whether they thought such an initiative might be successful if all teachers participated. When Andrea asked how they would monitor implementation of the practices to ensure that each teacher was participating, some members of the team seemed uneasy. They didn't want to be responsible for checking up on their colleagues and thought some teachers might resent this. The group decided it might be best to discuss the survey results and the potential plan at the next staff meeting and ask each grade level to decide how they could monitor implementation of the practices to ensure that each teacher was participating. Sherri asked that each team provide her with a report about teachers' use of the practices once a week. The leadership team agreed to collect data after the four-week period to check on students' progress in learning the math facts.

When Tom checked in with Sherri for her coaching session midway through the intervention cycle, Sherri reported that some grade levels were making good progress but that others weren't following through on their agreements to use the practices. Tom asked Sherri to reflect on why this might be the case and some ways she might address the issue. Sherri thought about the leadership responsibilities associated with student achievement and wondered if she had been clear about her expectations that teachers use the agreed-upon instructional practices. Maybe she hadn't monitored the implementation as closely as she should have. Sherri decided to start visiting each classroom for a few minutes each day during math time and asking students about their progress with math facts. She also planned to devote time during each staff meeting for cross-grade level teams to discuss strategies that were working. These new leadership strategies would increase Sherri's visibility and her awareness of how situations seemed to be playing out in the school.

## Reflecting on the Experience with the Fractal Initiative

At the next meeting, the leadership team members couldn't wait to report the increase in the number of students who knew their math facts. There were just a few students at each grade level who were still struggling, but teachers thought they had a better handle on which strategies worked for different students. They were looking forward to really focusing on the struggling students during the after-lunch club. A few of the teachers who had planning time then wanted to devote part of their time to helping Sherri with the after-lunch club. Sherri took that as a good sign that teachers were feeling like their efforts were paying off.

Andrea asked the leadership team to reflect on their fractal experience. She made a list of the steps (collect and analyze data, hypothesize, select and gain agreement on strategies, monitor strategy implementation, and determine strategy effectiveness) they had taken and asked them to think about what had worked and what hadn't worked for each of the steps. Andrea asked one of the group members to record key ideas from the discussion on chart paper so that the group could refer to these ideas as necessary during the rest of the meeting and in future meetings.

That afternoon, Andrea and Tom were

heartened as they watched the assembly at which the teachers and students celebrated the latest data showing 85 percent student proficiency in memorizing math facts. Sherri gave a short presentation thanking the teachers for their efforts and noting that there was 100 percent participation from the staff in the brief project.

At the faculty meeting that followed the assembly, Andrea and Tom facilitated an activity during which teachers were asked to analyze the success of students in learning their math facts. The teachers wrote down their ideas, and when they shared as a group, they found that almost every teacher had attributed the success of the project to the fact that everyone participated, knew exactly what was expected of them, and had agreed to participate in the project. Tom brought home to the group the point that it wasn't enough to simply have strategies, it was critical to "operationalize" them — to describe what they would look like in practice. One faculty member then pointed out that by having each person agree to the plan, they had added a new type of accountability to their work.

Sherri and the members of the leadership team were excited at this success and at the attitude it seemed to have generated among the staff. Perhaps, Sherri thought, this efficacy idea had some merit. And the idea of "shared agreements" was something she was sure that she and the team would pursue.

## Moving Toward a Plan

After their success with the math facts intervention, the team wondered what they were supposed to do next. Andrea reminded them that their long-term goals were to develop a purposeful community and to increase their skills for leading school improvement. She explained that part of leading school improvement is ensuring that the strategies in the improvement plan are the right ones, that the strategies are implemented, that their implementation is monitored, and that their effectiveness is evaluated. Their fractal experience had taken them through this cycle. Now they needed to return to the school improvement plan and try a bigger piece of work to hone their skills in each step of the process. The team knew from their reflection on the fractal experience that not everything had gone as well as they had hoped, so they were willing to revisit the plan and think more carefully about their role in implementing it.

Andrea encouraged them to focus their efforts in one area. The team thought it made sense to continue with math because they had already done some work there and students' math proficiency was lower than their proficiency in reading. Andrea explained that one of the factors to consider when reviewing improvement strategies is whether they address factors associated with student achievement. She provided them with a list of such factors (see *What Works in Schools*, Marzano, 2003). The team then reviewed the strategies for improving mathematics, using a list of questions that Andrea had posed: Why were these strategies selected? Are the strategies research-based? Do teachers know how to implement the strategies? What professional development do teachers need to implement the strategies effectively? When and how will they learn to use these strategies? Do the strategies address the factors that are associated with student achievement?

Several teachers said they weren't sure how well the strategies in the plan addressed the factors that are associated with student achievement or which factors it was most important for Truman to address. Andrea suggested that the team gather some data to answer these questions and suggested that they use a questionnaire included in *What Works in Schools* (Marzano, 2003). They agreed to complete the questionnaire during their next meeting without McREL and to discuss the results when Andrea returned the following month.

At the next meeting, the team decided to focus its energy on two strategies related to improving math achievement. One of the strategies was in the plan — teach students specific problem-solving strategies (i.e., guess and check, work backwards, make a table, draw a picture). The other one was based on the results of the *What Works in Schools* self-assessment. The team decided that because Truman had an increasing number of ELL students and students receiving free or reduced price lunch, they needed to identify a vocabulary list for mathematics for each grade level and adopt a systematic approach to teaching vocabulary.

Two members of the team, along with Sherri, agreed to write up the team's latest thinking. The leadership team directed the writers to come up with a draft of the proposed plan, which the team would then take to grade level meetings in order to inform teachers of the rationale for the proposals, gauge opinions, and obtain additional ideas from the teachers on a possible third strategy and the timing of the implementation. The team directed the writers to keep the new plan simple, so that it could be easily understood, implemented, monitored, and evaluated. Because of this desire for simplicity, the team decided to name the new plan the "working plan" and include it as an appendix in the larger plan that was required by the district.

The team realized it would be important to present the proposal as a "work in progress' that was based on the school's own data, research based practices, and a probability of success, but which was still open to new ideas. The goal of the team was to begin to establish ownership on the part of the rest of the faculty, rather than presenting them with a "fait accompli." The leadership team agreed to remind the faculty of their own analysis of the reasons for the success of the fractal mathematics improvement experience.

After receiving a positive response from the faculty, the team was nearing the point when they would be ready to launch their plan, but first they needed to think about how, besides using yearly summative student achievement data, they would monitor their progress toward their goals.

Andrea provided an article about formative and summative methods of assessing the success of a school improvement plan. The group read the article and developed a strategy for determining the success or failure of their plan. Now they had a way to monitor progress so that the team could celebrate success and build on previous achievements.

## SUMMARY OF ACTIONS

In Stage 3, McREL staff provide guidance for forming the leadership team, and offer the leadership team an overview of the *Success in Sight* intervention and intended long-term outcomes. McREL also provides an overview of the school-, teacher-, and student-level practices correlated with improved student achievement.

During this stage, school staff are responsible for creating a team to lead the improvement effort, and scheduling time for the team to meet with McREL and on their own. The leadership team then prioritizes needs, and, with McREL, identifies an initial focus for the team's work — one that is manageable and which allows the team to work through the steps of the improvement process and experience success. They then establish goals for improvement related to the focus area, identify strategies for accomplishing the goals, identify formative and summative methods for monitoring and evaluating progress toward the goals, and determine which aspects of the change have first-order implications and which have second-order implications. The team also develops a timeline for associated activities.

## TOOL FOR STAGE 3 : TOOLS FOR CHOOSING A FRACTAL EXPERIENCE

Many schools have never experienced the success that comes from taking collective action toward identified goals. For such schools, embarking on a full scale improvement process can be a daunting experience that holds little hope for success. Fractal experiences are useful for overcoming this hesitancy, and for building a sense of collective efficacy on the part of a faculty or group of teachers.

The Choosing a Fractal Experience Worksheet (see Exhibit 9) focuses the team on the criteria that will increase the chances that their experience with a change initiative will be successful. This tool can be used with or without the assistance of an external change agent.

**Exhibit 9: Worksheet for Choosing a Fractal Experience**

Use this worksheet to determine whether the small experience with change that you will undertake fits the criteria for a successful fractal experience.

| | |
|---|---|
| **The problem is:** | |
| **The solution is:** | |
| **Criteria** | **How We Know We Meet the Criterion** |
| We have clearly specified the problem. | |
| We have clearly specified the solution. | |
| We can measure the effects of the solution. | |
| All or almost all of the staff cares about this problem. | |
| All or almost all of the staff agrees to implement the solution. | |
| The solution is simple and easily managed. | |
| We have selected a relatively short timeframe for the fractal experience. | |
| We have made plans for monitoring and adapting the solution if necessary. | |
| We have made plans to discuss the fractal experience after it ends and document what we learned from the experience. | |

# CHAPTER 5 Launching the Plan

Up to this point, school leaders have been laying the groundwork for their improvement efforts. In Stage 4, they launch the plan and ensure that all participants have a copy of it and are clear about their individual roles in achieving the plan goals. As the team begins to carry out the initial actions they have planned, staff will need to acquire new knowledge and skills and, possibly, new ways of working together.

As a result, this stage is focused on individual and collective learning about a host of topics related to the factors that affect student achievement, including leadership, instruction, curriculum, professional development, collaborative work, etc. The team learns how to establish structures and processes that support the development of a purposeful community. They also learn how to manage the implications that proposed changes have for stakeholders, particularly teachers. In addition, they deepen their understanding of shared leadership by learning how to work collaboratively to carry out leadership responsibilities that are associated with high levels of student achievement. Two-way communication between the leadership team and the larger faculty is critical during this stage.

## TRUMAN ELEMENTARY SCHOOL'S JOURNEY: STAGE 4 OF *SUCCESS IN SIGHT*

As the story of Truman Elementary School continues, the focus is on learning. The team learns how to manage second-order change and establish structures and processes that help the team function more effectively and the staff become involved in the design, implementation, and monitoring of improvement strategies. The team encounters bumps in the road as they develop new skills for leading change, but they persevere with their efforts.

### Facing the Realities of Change

Andrea and Tom were pleased with the progress that Truman's leadership team was making, but they knew that the most difficult part of the school improvement process lay ahead. Future gains would not come as easily as the increases in student performance with math facts. Truman's leadership team had done a fine job in analyzing their school improvement plan and selecting a few strategies to implement on a school-wide basis.

Nonetheless, the next part of the process, Launching the Plan, would test the leadership abilities of Sherri and the entire school team. The McREL staff knew that

**Second-Order Change**

*A change with second-order implications is perceived as a break with past practice, inconsistent with existing beliefs and values, incongruent with prevailing organizational norms, and requiring new knowledge and skills that are not easily learned.*

implementing the strategies would require changes in values, beliefs, and behaviors on the part of the Truman staff. It would be critical that the leadership team understand the difficulty of this fundamental or second-order kind of change (see sidebar) and actively manage its effects. It would also be critical to monitor the implementation of the changes themselves to make sure that they were being implemented as planned.

Through her coaching sessions with Tom, Sherri understood that the next stage of the improvement process was even more critical. She was intrigued by the idea of "managing the change" and was looking forward to learning more about this from the McREL staff. Her biggest concern, however, was making sure that teachers throughout the building actually implemented the strategies that the leadership team had developed. She felt that the strategies were solid, but she knew that many of her teachers still believed that, in the end, they could close their doors and use whichever strategies they preferred. As she thought back to the team's discussion of "traditional" school culture, she realized that she would have to carefully monitor the implementation of the plan. She made a note to add this item to the next agenda of the leadership team.

A key part of the implementation of the new strategies was providing professional development that would help teachers learn new ways of delivering instruction. As Sherri and Andrea talked about what was needed, they considered staff development needs at several different levels. First, teachers would need professional development related to the new teaching strategies. Second, Sherri and the leadership team would need professional development on the issues associated with managing second-order change. And third, there was the ongoing need for professional development on the type of shared leadership that the team was attempting to implement.

Sherri told Andrea that she didn't know how the school would design and coordinate this professional development, but realized that she had a leadership team to help her find a solution. Sherri was immensely relieved by this epiphany: it wasn't all up to her. She and Andrea discussed the upcoming meeting of the leadership team, which Sherri would lead without assistance from McREL staff. Andrea suggested that the leadership team establish a design team, which could research various structures and processes to support Truman's improvement efforts and make recommendations to the larger group.

At the meeting, Sherri presented her ideas regarding the professional development that teachers would need to implement the new strategies and used a discussion protocol (see sidebar) to elicit ideas from the team about ways that professional development could be delivered to Truman teachers.

However, as Sherri later reported to Andrea, it was at that point that things seemed to fall apart. One teacher brought up a concern over large numbers of parents in the hallways of the building and asked that something be done. This discussion lasted almost a half hour before someone pointed out that they were running out of time and wouldn't get to the rest of their agenda. They agreed to put the parent question on hold, but then another teacher said, "Since we're bringing up concerns, I've noticed that there have been a couple of times that people have agreed to something in our meeting but then been critical of the decision later. Once, I even heard them complaining in the teachers' workroom."

**Protocol**

*A protocol is an agreed-upon guideline for a conversation that can help groups make the most of their time together and build the skills and culture necessary for collaborative work. Protocols build in a space for listening, and often give people a license to listen without having to continuously respond. See Colorado Critical Friends Group's Web site: http://www.coloradocfg.org/Summer04/coaches_handbook.htm for more information.*

***TIP:*** *Use design teams as a means of managing second–order change. People often enjoy being on design teams because the work usually has a defined scope and timeline. Design teams take advantage of the intelligence within the organization while at the same time freeing members of the larger group from a certain amount of detail work.*

Sherri pointed out that since their time was up, and they had not yet discussed the professional development agenda item, the team would need to take additional time to finish the scheduled work. Before adjourning, she asked for a small group to meet with her within the next two days to review the norms that the team had developed during their first meeting.

## Establishing Structures and Processes to Accomplish Work

McREL's next meeting with the leadership team went more smoothly. The small group charged with reviewing the norms reported that their discussion led them to conclude that the norms were adequate as written. They recommended, however, that the team pay more attention to monitoring their use and guaranteeing that the norms were being followed by everyone. All members of the team agreed that they shared the responsibility to talk with anyone they felt was violating a norm. One team member proposed the idea of a "parking lot" in which unexpected topics that arose could be recorded and dealt with by the group at a later time. Another member asked that "How are we doing?"

be added as a regular agenda item at the beginning of each meeting, thus helping the team to remember to attend to their norms.

Moving on to their scheduled agenda item, the leadership team agreed that it might be important to investigate ways that other schools had provided professional development and to search the literature to learn more about best practices in staff development and in implementing new instructional practices. The team appointed a small group to investigate and report back their findings at the next meeting. This "design team" would include two representatives from the leadership team and two other teachers in the building who had experience in staff development and working with adult learners.

At their next monthly meeting without McREL the leadership team moved through the agenda more slowly. When Sherri called on members of the design team to give their report, there was silence as the two members looked at each other. "I guess we get an F," one of them said: apparently the group had never met. Sherri made light of the moment, but emphasized that the larger group was counting on the work of the design team to be completed in a timely manner.

The next month, when Andrea and Tom returned, things were different. The design team had some ideas to present, but they weren't sure what recommendations to make. One of the teachers said she felt overwhelmed by all the information and thought it would be best if the larger leadership team helped sort it out. Andrea and Tom were impressed with the ownership demonstrated by the design team and their willingness to admit that they needed help. The leadership team divided into small groups to discuss the information that the design team had presented, and then presented their recommendations to the entire team. Among the recommendations was a call for structured group planning time at each grade level, the formation of study groups around the new instructional strategies, and a system of peer coaching that would provide teachers with guided practice in the new strategies. The group also requested that the McREL staff provide short professional development pieces around shared leadership and managing second order change at future leadership team meetings.

Before adjourning, Andrea asked the design team members for permission to discuss the design team's lack of results in the previous month. She made sure to mention that this "after action review" was not to assign blame or guilt, but to determine what the facts of the situation were, and how to avoid a similar situation in the future. The two design group members admitted that they were busy and each simply waited for the other to take the lead. Clearly the after action review had resulted in a new learning — that when a new group is formed, it is helpful if someone is assigned the lead.

## Learning How to Manage Change

At their next planning meeting, Andrea and Tom sketched out a short "curriculum"

***TIP:*** *Take time regularly to reflect on your progress toward developing a purposeful community and the processes used to get there. Implementation can be very complex — take opportunities to step back and connect what you are doing to the bigger picture. This helps people feel a sense of coherence rather than fragmentation.*

on change management and shared leadership that they could use with the leadership team. They began implementing the curriculum in a "just-in-time" manner. That is, when the team was in need of new skills to address a particular challenge, Tom and Andrea were ready to assist with teaching and learning activities they had developed and compiled from their work with leadership teams at other field sites. Based on previous experience, they knew that new leadership skills were best learned in the context of authentic problems.

Andrea suggested that the first learning activity be about clarity of expectations regarding the use of the new instructional strategies. In her experience, initiatives often failed because of a lack of clarity about what an innovation should look like when placed in practice.

Andrea demonstrated to the leadership team the use of an innovation configuration process (see http://www.nsdc.org/library/publications/jsd/roy252.cfm) for clarifying expectations and assisting in monitoring the implementation of the new strategies. This often-underused process calls upon all stakeholders to participate in defining the characteristics of the initiative and the acceptable level of implementation. The team decided to use the process with the entire staff so as to create increased understanding and ownership from those who would be implementing the changes.

Sherri liked the idea that the entire staff shared the same view of the changes and that everyone would have responsibility for implementation. She recalled change initiatives that had failed at this stage — she now realized that there was often an assumption of what should be done that was not shared by everyone. She felt a sense of optimism around the use of the new strategies — the team seemed to be accepting responsibility for following through to get everyone on the same page. This was truly something different, but having everyone on the same page was something that would be viewed as a fundamental change by many members of the faculty. How would the team manage this change?

Tom and Andrea realized that the next several months of work with the team would be heavily weighted toward implementation of the changes, measuring effects of the change, and managing the associated effects of the change. However, they were also looking ahead to the day when the Truman faculty would themselves become the "managing agents" for whatever subsequent change initiatives came along. To successfully identify and meet challenges down the road, Truman staff would need to operate as a purposeful community. To do that, they needed to have a deep understanding of all aspects of a purposeful community: accomplish purpose, use of assets, agreed-upon processes, collective efficacy. Tom and Andrea had introduced the team to the concept of purposeful community in their first few meetings with the team and had had several discussions after that about the collective efficacy aspect of purposeful community. It seemed like an appropriate time to work with the team on the purpose aspect. Adding clarity to the school's statement of their purpose in working together would help move improvement efforts forward and assist the staff in sustaining the initiatives that were underway.

Over the next several months, the McREL staff organized the leadership team meetings and provided a consistent routine that helped the meetings move quickly and efficiently. Their strategies included a consistent agenda format, collaborative facilitation, and group decision making.

The staff also modeled a system of shared leadership, pointing out how leaders could take advantage of the wisdom of the group while still discharging positional responsibilities. Tom's coaching sessions with Sherri often focused on shared leadership. He helped her understand the "culture of silence" at Truman and ways she might address it. In her dual role of principal and team member, Sherri learned that by posing authentic questions to the group, and trusting their ability to come up with positive solutions to challenges, she experienced an increase in her authority as positional leader. She truly felt a sense of relief that decisions did not always fall on her shoulders. When at times she did need to exert what might be called "positional authority," the team seemed to understand and be accepting of her decisions.

## SUMMARY OF ACTIONS

In Stage 4, McREL staff provide professional development related both to the focus of change (e.g., a process for teaching vocabulary) and to managing change with second-order implications. Other professional development offered during Stage 4 focuses on understanding and applying the concept of shared leadership. During this stage, McREL also facilitates the establishment of structures and processes to support long-term improvement (e.g., time for professional development, collaborative teams, norms for working together), as well as the development of a monitoring and evaluation system.

School and leadership team responsibilities during this stage include providing time for teachers to learn what they need to know to improve student achievement for the short term and the long term; establishing structures (e.g., study groups, collaborative teams) for teacher learning; establishing norms for working together as a faculty; implementing strategies for managing second-order implications; implementing strategies for strengthening purposeful communities; and establishing a system for monitoring and evaluating improvement efforts.

## TOOL FOR STAGE 4: DEVELOPING SHARED AGREEMENTS

When teachers analyze data and choose improvement strategies themselves, their involvement and ownership sets the stage for commitments around how those strategies will be implemented. Shared agreements are simply group commitments to individual actions, formalized in a public fashion, and monitored by the group. They help teachers answer the question, "So what does this strategy mean for what I will do in the classroom tomorrow?" An example of a shared agreement is "We agree to teach mathematics for one hour and 15 minutes each day."

Teachers often operate independently and make their own decisions about which improvement strategies to incorporate into their practice. Because of the powerful pull of this traditional culture of "private practice," fellow teachers and even administrators are often hesitant to involve themselves in the instructional decisions of their peers. Shared agreements provide one way to overcome this obstacle. The Developing Shared Agreements tool can be used by leadership teams to guide staff in developing shared agreements. In using the tool, staff discuss what teachers need to do in their classrooms to implement the strategy, specify expectations for using the strategy, publicly commit to the shared agreements, and discuss ways to hold themselves accountable for following the shared agreements.

**Exhibit 10: Developing Shared Agreements: Questions to Consider**

- What is the strategy that we will implement?
- What are the actions that support this strategy (i.e., what do I need to do in my classroom to implement this strategy)?
- What are the expectations for using this strategy (e.g., number of times per week, number of minutes per day)?
- How will we publicly commit to the use of this strategy?
- How will we monitor our shared agreements?

CHAPTER 6

# Tracking Progress

Stage 5 focuses on an area that is critical to the health of the education system — feedback. During this stage, the school's staff monitor and evaluate the implementation of the plan. The team collects and analyzes formative data and makes adjustments to strategies, structures, policies, and processes as indicated and celebrates small successes along the way to the larger goal. At the appropriate time, the team collects summative data, celebrates successes, and determines the focus of the next stages in the improvement process. The data team, or the whole staff, also determines whether feedback is being used effectively for system improvement and whether or not the monitoring and evaluation system needs to be refined.

## TRUMAN ELEMENTARY SCHOOL'S JOURNEY: STAGE 5 OF *SUCCESS IN SIGHT*

As the story of Truman Elementary continues, the team learns the importance of and strategies for monitoring and evaluating individual students' progress and the school's progress toward improvement goals. Over time, the team learns that they must not only judge success in terms of short-term gains in student improvement but also in terms of the school's ability to function as a purposeful community that can engage in continuous improvement.

### Monitoring the Team's Progress

As the work progressed with Truman, Andrea and Tom introduced a variety of ways for the team to monitor progress toward their goals of developing a purposeful community, increasing their capacity to lead school improvement efforts, and improving student achievement. For example, they demonstrated ways in which the team could monitor its own behavior during meetings. Wandering off the topic of discussion (taking "birdwalks") became less common as the months progressed. Team members began monitoring meeting behavior, with comments such as "I think we could put that in the parking lot," for discussion later, or, " It doesn't seem like we need to be spending time on that right now."

The team also agreed to track the effectiveness of their work with other teachers in the school. They developed a questionnaire and used it examine how teachers perceived the work of the team and the team's ability to communicate effectively. Asking teachers, "how are we doing?," became second nature to the team and after they asked, they spent quite a bit of time analyzing, the feedback. They tracked the responses and set goals based on steady improvement in responses from teachers.

Sherri also became more data-oriented. As she explored the causes of the teachers' reticence, Tom helped her think about how her own behavior might be playing a part in the problem. Sherri surveyed teachers, asking them a few specific questions regarding their willingness to speak up in meetings. She also asked teachers if there were things she should be doing differently to help teachers "find their voice." The feedback she received gave her ideas on how she might rein in her natural tendency to give people answers when they might only need a sympathetic ear. She had begun "listening to hear" rather than "listening to solve." She was looking forward to the next round of survey data to see if teachers had noticed a difference in her interactions.

## Monitoring the Progress of Change Among the Staff as a Whole

After eight months of working in the school, Tom and Andrea noticed a change in the tenor of conversations in the teachers' workroom — fewer comments regarding the personal lives of students and their families and more conversation around instructional strategies and success stories with individual students. When Tom and Andrea shared this observation with the leadership team, they emphasized that informal observations can be helpful for monitoring progress, especially if there is a way to capture the information. One of the team members suggested that they re-administer the collective efficacy instrument to the staff to see if they could document this change in teacher attitude toward student learning. When the results were compiled, the team was excited to see the change reflected in the numbers. Sherri made a connection between these results and her feeling that teachers had taken on much more responsibility for student learning. There was less blaming and more looking for solutions. Teachers' concern for children's emotional needs still existed, but at the same time, teachers were thinking more deeply about academic learning.

***TIP:*** *Begin leadership team meetings with an activity that builds relationships among team members and provides a "temperature check" on how team members are feeling about the team's work and the culture for improvement.*

Another sign that the team was monitoring the progress of the whole staff came at the last meeting of the school year. As the team reflected on what had been accomplished during the year, they discussed the possibility of building on their new understanding about identifying specific actions that everyone agreed to take to implement improvement strategies. Having such "shared agreements" had made a real difference when they had all focused on helping students learn their math facts earlier in the year. Tom asked, "What might happen if the improvement strategies you identified were in use throughout the building?" The team considered how these strategies might be implemented. They scheduled a series of summer meetings at which they would explain the strategies to teachers. Each grade level would develop a series of new "shared agreements" around the strategies and commit themselves to their use during the upcoming school year. The team adjourned for the summer with a sense of excitement and possibility.

## Monitoring Student Achievement at the School Level

It's important for a team to monitor its progress, but it's also critical that the team monitor students' progress resulting from the improvement strategies. Throughout their first year of work with the Truman team, Andrea and Tom talked with the team about data, but they hadn't yet introduced a formal process for analyzing a variety of school–level student performance data. When the school's annual summative test results arrived and the staff needed to revise the school improvement plan for the next year, Tom and Andrea decided it was time to engage the staff in a "data retreat," in which staff members would learn how to effectively analyze and use data.

Based on their past experiences in leading a variety of groups through a data retreat, Tom and Andrea decided to work with Sherri to prioritize the outcomes for the day. First, they wanted to introduce the group to a general process for using data to inform school improvement. Second, they wanted to create an authentic opportunity for the team to engage in the process that resulted in an effective school improvement plan. They decided to continue the focus on mathematics because 40 percent of the students still were not performing at the proficient level. Focusing on one content area would help the team get a sense of the whole process without feeling overwhelmed. Working on the reading goal at a later time would provide the team with the chance to practice independently.

**Types of Data**

- Outcome data: Information about the extent to which students have acquired specific knowledge and skills
- Demographic data: Information about student and community characteristics
- Program data: Factors related to school and teacher efforts
- Perception data: Information related to stakeholders' attitudes and beliefs about the school's programs and practice

Prior to the meeting, Andrea and Tom helped Sherri identify multiple sources of data for the team to draw from during their data day. They served as facilitators, while Sherri and the team actively engaged in the structured activities. First, Andrea introduced a four-step data-driven decision-making process:

1. Collect and Organize Data
2. Analyze Data
3. Pose Hypotheses
4. Use Data

The team members spent the first part of the morning talking about the different sources of data available to them. McREL staff encouraged the team to think in terms of four different categories of data: (1) outcome, (2) demographic, (3) program, and (4) perception. The team agreed that they had traditionally relied heavily on outcome data to inform their decisions. However, after discussing additional types of data, the team identified some additional sources of information they hoped to examine. McREL staff explained that the goal for Step 1 is to choose a problem or focal issue, identify different types of data that could help shed light on that issue, organize existing information, and collect any additional data needed. Although the team had a wealth of student achievement data, members realized they lacked data in certain other spheres, particularly program data. They realized that they needed to develop a better system for collecting data about the school's policies and practices, especially those related to curriculum, instructional practices, and professional development.

The team then moved on to the second step — analysis. They spent the bulk of the day systematically analyzing and making factual observations based on their state mathematics assessment results, STAR math test results for the four quarters of the school year, relevant demographic information, program data related to math instruction, data from a school climate survey, and results from the teacher questionnaire related to instructional practices and collective efficacy. As a result of their fractal experience, the team realized the important relationship of data to collective efficacy. It was important for teachers to know that their work was making a difference, not just suspecting or assuming that it did. Having data regarding individual student progress would certainly contribute to Truman's developing sense of collective efficacy.

The team practiced making very specific and factual observations — those that could be easily understood and confirmed by anyone looking at the same data set. This proved to be quite a challenge for the group — it was very difficult for them to dig deeper and deeper into the data without jumping to explanations or solutions. Some of the discussions were very lively, with different team members disagreeing about what the data revealed. Sherri took note of those instances and realized the importance of having multiple perspectives during this phase of the process.

After thoroughly examining all of the data and summarizing their observations (both strengths and areas of concern), the group spent some time talking about how they could present this information to the entire staff. Tom and Andrea encouraged them to do this, explaining that given time constraints, it often works well to have a smaller group work through the analysis phase and then bring the remainder of the staff into the discussions about hypotheses and action steps. One team member raised a concern that faculty members not involved in examining the data might be skeptical. The team agreed, however, that their methodical approach and focus on "just the facts" would help increase staff confidence in the information presented. They also assigned a subset of the team to prepare a clear, organized presentation for the first faculty meeting when school began in the fall. They planned to distribute a list of strengths and areas of concern, as well as a set of charts and graphs that supported the statements.

Although the team wanted to get remaining staff members' input before officially continuing with the process, they practiced Steps 3 and 4 so that they would have a better sense of the full process. For Step 3, the team prioritized the areas of concern. They chose the highest priority — mathematical problem solving — and began generating hypotheses about the root of the problem. To help with the brainstorming process, the facilitators asked questions such as, "what do you think are some of the factors contributing to the discrepancy between the level at which you would like students to perform on problem-solving tasks and their actual level of performance?"

Finally, the group discussed Step 4 — using data. Andrea explained that all of their hard work today would be lost if they were unable to put it to use. She explained that "using data" involves: (a) setting or revising goals, (b) identifying appropriate strategies to help them move toward their goals, and (c) identifying ways to monitor strategy implementation and effectiveness. Tom and Andrea encouraged the group to generate both school-level (e.g., curriculum alignment) and teacher-level strategies (e.g., instructional strategies) for addressing the priority. One team member noted that it was much easier than they thought to generate strategies — many could come directly from the hypotheses. Another team member shared an insight with the group: "I think I understand why we weren't always successful in implementing our plan before — we weren't clear about how the strategies would play out day to day. We also didn't think about gauging whether what we were doing was actually making a difference."

***TIP:*** *Use a structured process for looking at data, but keep the process simple. The structure helps team members systematically look for patterns and relationships, summarize strengths and weaknesses, and prioritize weak areas before brainstorming possible causes. This puts the brakes on "jumping ahead" to causes without first understanding the problem.*

At the end of the day, team members shared their reflections. Some were excited to gather staff input and refine their existing plan into a more effective one. Several members mentioned that the plan had much more meaning for them this year than it had the prior year. Some members were concerned about some of the implications that surfaced in Step 4. Now that they knew about second-order change, they knew that some of their strategies might meet with resistance. Andrea and Tom thought the team was ready to learn more about managing second order change and suggested that the first leadership team meeting of the next school year be devoted entirely to that topic.

## Monitoring Student Achievement at the Individual Student Level

Both Tom and Andrea knew from their experience with the improvement process that tracking school-wide data was important, but in itself was not enough to increase student achievement. What was equally important was tracking student performance data at the individual level and linking that data to changes in instruction and the use of resources. When teachers talked about individual students, they were able to bring their collective wisdom to bear on solutions to the challenges that those individual students might face. Formalizing a system for holding these conversations would be a critical next step for Truman.

Andrea wondered how she might introduce this idea at Truman. She was curious as to how the teams in the school were using their common planning time and at the beginning of their work in year two, she asked Sherri if she could sit in on a team planning session. When she did so with two different grades, she discovered that the teams were using the time to work individually and when they did work together, they discussed topics such as the grade-level budget and field trips. At the next meeting of the leadership team, she presented the information she had collected regarding use of the grade-level team planning time.

Andrea shared stories about schools that had begun to work more collaboratively on issues of individual student learning and asked the teachers for their thoughts about the idea that "schools improve one student at a time." After some discussion, Sherri asked if there might be a grade level that

### Benefits of Collaborative Monitoring of Individual Student Performance

When teachers meet regularly to discuss formative assessments of individual students and groups of students, they accomplish several purposes. These discussions provide a forum for

- Defining agreed-upon levels of student proficiency
- Judging the efficacy of the teaching strategies being used
- Sharing alternative instructional strategies that, when implemented, might prove to be more effective than current strategies for particular students
- Offering staff development that is tightly connected to teachers' daily life in the classroom
- Creating benchmarks for measuring progress toward meeting school-wide summative assessment goals by aggregating the progress of individual students
- Coordinating the effective use of resources (financial, teacher time, etc.) and reallocating resources if necessary
- Reinforcing collective efficacy
- Celebrating success

would volunteer to pilot test the process. The third grade representative to the team thought that her colleagues might be interested and asked if Andrea would attend their meeting and model the process for the teachers. Andrea agreed to meet later with the team and set up a pilot program to test a new discussion structure.

When Andrea met with the third grade team, she proposed a structure in which the teachers would meet each week to review student work. She explained the benefits of this process (see sidebar on pg. 54) and the importance of mandatory participation, use of a facilitator, and a regular meeting time. She told the team that to provide time for them, Sherri and Janet Wilson, the central office administrator, would combine the three classes taught by the team and team teach science lessons for two hours per week for the next three months. Sherri committed to changing the master schedule to make the planning time permanent if the team felt the pilot project was worthwhile. She also told the teachers that she would monitor the process to be sure the time was being used as intended.

***TIP:*** *Provide a variety of tools (e.g., indicator lists, open-ended questions, "to do" list) and considerable guidance to help teams hold themselves accountable for the actions they agreed to take.*

Andrea continued to describe the process of analyzing student work to the third grade teachers. At each meeting, the team examined data demonstrating the performance of students who were working below the proficient level and attempt to gauge the reasons why. They would then design new interventions. The special education teacher and the reading teacher would also attend the meeting, as would the teacher assistant who often worked at the grade level.

At the first meeting, the teachers shared the formative assessment information they had collected on a grid that Andrea had provided for them. The names of children working below grade level in reading and math had been highlighted in yellow, and Andrea led the discussion around what those children still needed to be successful. One third grade teacher mentioned a student with ADHD who performed well in class, but not on tests. The group quickly designed an alternative assessment that could be administered by the teacher assistant and might better allow the student to demonstrate proficiency. The teachers also discussed the difficulty of "seat work" for several students who had not mastered grade level reading material. The team designed a rotation that would allow the reading teacher to provide a second small group instructional period each day for those students — thus giving them two reading groups per day with adults.

The reading teacher also mentioned the strategy of reciprocal teaching, in which small groups of students discuss the material they had read. This was new to two of the teachers and they discussed how this strategy might assist certain students who were having problems in reading comprehension. The team work continued in this vein for the entire hour and a half.

As the year progressed, the third grade teachers began making more use of the formative assessments provided by the school district. Although these assessments previously had been available, the teachers hadn't really understood how to use them.

***TIP:*** *Explicitly discuss the importance of celebrating successes small and large and identify reasons and ways to celebrate as the work progresses. This reinforces the idea that continual improvement is a process and each step forward needs to be affirmed. Celebrating successes also helps people persevere when the going gets tough.*

The third grade teachers, with Andrea's coaching, began to apply the notion of "assessment for learning" as they used the district "formatives" to inform their understanding of instructional targets, the level of student learning, and eventually, their own instructional abilities. As they became more able to closely track student learning, Sherri began hearing comments such as, "Well, 55 percent of our kids are proficient at main idea. What can we do to get another 15 percent to mastery?"

Teachers at other grade levels took note, and after a presentation to the leadership team by the third grade teachers, the team requested that Sherri consider restructuring the schedule to give teachers at all grade levels time to replicate what the third grade teachers were doing.

Sherri agreed, with the stipulation that the conversations would not be "optional," and that the teams would follow the model developed by the third grade team. The leadership team gathered input from each grade level and talked with the art, music, physical education teachers, media specialist, and paraprofessionals, to gather ideas for ways to revise the schedule. The team came up with a new master schedule that provided time for these collegial conversations, which soon became one of the centerpieces of Truman's improvement efforts.

At the end of two years, teachers were able to predict with a fairly high degree of accuracy, the performance of their students on the state reading and math tests. Teachers celebrated as their students showed substantial gains in achievement.

## SUMMARY OF ACTIONS

During Stage 5, McREL staff provide the school staff with professional development related to monitoring and evaluating improvement efforts (e.g., analyzing, interpreting, and using a variety of data for program improvement).

The school leadership team, meanwhile, is engaged in implementing the monitoring and evaluation system by collecting formative and summative data and adjusting strategies, structures, processes, and policies as needed and sharing that information with stakeholders. In this stage, the leadership team also determines the focus and scope of their next improvement effort, and assesses the effectiveness of their evaluation system (e.g., by determining whether the appropriate data are being collected).

## TOOL FOR STAGE 5: LEADERSHIP SELF-ASSESSMENT QUESTIONAIRE

The Leadership Self-Assessment Questionnaire (see Exhibit 11) is designed to help teams reflect on their effectiveness. It focuses their attention on the purpose of their work as well as the ways in which they work. Each team member completes the questionnaire and the results are aggregated. The power of the tool stems from the discussions of the results. Teams should use the results to identify actions they need to take to increase the effectiveness of their work and strengthen the relationships within the team and with the rest of the staff.

**Exhibit 11: Leadership Team Self-Assessment Questionnaire**

Please answer the following questions by placing a check mark in the column that best represents your opinion.

| To what extent... | Not at All<br>1 | 2 | Some-what<br>3 | 4 | To a Great Extent<br>5 |
|---|---|---|---|---|---|
| 1. is the work of the leadership team related to the school's improvement goals? | | | | | |
| 2. are the efforts of the leadership team coherent? | | | | | |
| 3. are the roles and responsibilities of leadership team members clearly defined? | | | | | |
| 4. do all leadership team members contribute equally to accomplishing the team's work? | | | | | |
| 5. does the rest of the staff support leadership team decisions? | | | | | |
| 6. do individual members of the leadership team deliver the same message to their respective teams? | | | | | |
| 7. does the leadership team hold itself accountable for following through on decisions and actions? | | | | | |
| 8. does the leadership team honor and encourage divergent points of view on the leadership team? | | | | | |
| 9. does the leadership team seek input and feedback from divergent points of view from the rest of the staff? | | | | | |

# CHAPTER 7

# Maintaining Momentum

One of the goals of *Success in Sight* is to build the school's capacity for continuous improvement. This means that the school has structures and processes that will help it meet today's and tomorrow's challenges to educating all students. McREL staff work toward this goal throughout the various stages of the improvement process, but in Stage 6, deliberate actions are taken to help school staff members focus on and to assess the extent to which they have addressed the elements of sustainability. School staff members use the results of their self-assessment to develop a plan that ensures that they have the appropriate structures and processes in place for sustaining change and improvement. The plan may include ways to connect with other schools to form a network of ongoing support and virtual connections to the change agent (e.g., through email, online discussions, phone calls). Including these connections in the plan ensures that the last stage of the transfer of leadership for change from the change agent to the school staff occurs gradually rather than abruptly.

## TRUMAN ELEMENTARY SCHOOL'S JOURNEY: STAGE 6 OF *SUCCESS IN SIGHT*

After working together for a number of years, the change agent and school staff have developed a close relationship, and letting go can be difficult for both parties. It's a bittersweet time. The team has implemented its plans, met with success, and learned a great deal about how to engage in and lead school improvement. Now they are ready to go it alone. We finish our story of Truman Elementary as the school takes stock of its capacity for and commitment to continuous improvement.

***TIP:*** *Engage the leadership team in an authentic problem-solving task, without assistance from the change agent, before the change agent stops working with the site. (See tool for Stage 6).*

### Planning for Sustainability

After two years of working with Truman's leadership team, Andrea and Tom returned to the ideas underlying the last stage of *Success in Sight*, the "hand-off". The principal, leadership team and teaching staff at Truman would soon be on their own. Were they ready?

As often happened in Andrea's work, the staff at Truman had become familiar to her and she had developed many positive professional relationships and personal friendships during the course of her work. She knew from experience that the "hand-off" was a tenuous time for everyone involved.

The increase in collective efficacy among the staff, the changes in classroom practice, and the increases in student achievement at Truman were all still connected with her presence. The changes, while deeply gratifying to the team at Truman, were also still somewhat fragile.

***TIP:*** *Help the team document processes that they have learned. This documentation will serve as a valuable resource when the team is working on its own.*

Andrea reminded the leadership team of the initiatives that they had begun on their own. In fact, at the beginning of their second year at Truman, Tom and Andrea had conducted a review of the goals in the latest version of the school improvement plan. As part of this work, they had encouraged the teachers to choose one or two new improvement goals for the newest iteration of the improvement plan, and to follow through with them. The team had already demonstrated success with several of these initiatives, including one designed to increase students' writing performance. They were particularly encouraged by the results of their efforts to select an intervention, provide teachers with appropriate professional development, implement the new instructional strategies, and monitor the implementation: The school realized a 15 percent increase in the percentage of students proficient in writing between the first district assessment for the year and the second one!

At the next meeting with the leadership team, Andrea asked the team, "Is Truman ready to become the 'managing agent' for subsequent changes the school will need to address?" Several team members immediately said they weren't sure. They felt good about the progress they had made, but they didn't know if they knew as much as they needed to know. As one teacher said, "I've learned so much by being on this team, I now know how much more there is to learn." Andrea asked them to think about what things would "look like" at Truman when the school faculty could identify a challenge, collect data, generate hypotheses, initiate interventions, and manage change? What leadership and improvement strategies would be in place?

After team members discussed these questions in pairs for a few minutes, Andrea distributed a checklist of indicators of sustainability and asked the team to mark the indicators that were true of the school. During the discussion that followed, team members provided a rationale for why they selected specific indicators and identified which of the remaining indicators they thought the team should address as a team. What were they good at? What did they feel they still needed to learn? They developed a plan for working on these indicators and seemed confident that not too far in the future, they would be able to place a checkmark next to every indicator.

***TIP:*** *Monitor the indicators of sustainability identified in previous stages on a regular basis.*

Andrea and Tom had high hopes for the Truman team's ability to sustain improvement efforts after McREL staff stopped working with the school. Leadership was strong, and it wasn't only Sherri who had developed an excellent repertoire of leadership skills during the two years of Truman's work with McREL. As a result of their leadership team experience, teachers also had developed skills for leading school improvement efforts and managing change. Andrea and Tom had a great deal of trust in Sherri's ability to move the team ahead in the time between their visits and in the team's ability to take responsibility for improving student achievement. The school seemed to be benefiting from the "flywheel effect:" the phenomenon in which improvement efforts in an organization gain a critical momentum. People recognize the success of their efforts, and then, with little need for outside motivation, continue the work that led to their success. There was little need for constantly communicating the mission of the school —Truman's teachers were living it every day. This high level of collective efficacy on the part of the faculty would be a key factor in sustaining the work in the future.

***TIP:*** *Involve instructional support staff (e.g., building resource teachers, instructional coaches, mentors, professional developers) in the work of the team from the beginning so that they will know the team, the work, and the plan of action. They will provide a vital link to the rest of the staff and will be able to help the team maintain momentum, especially if they take on the role of internal change agent once the external change agent leaves.*

At their last meeting with the Truman team, Andrea and Tom encouraged the team to think about ways to share what they had learned with other schools and districts. When one of the team members suggested that the team submit a proposal to speak at the state's annual school improvement conference, everyone greeted the idea with enthusiasm. When the team took a short break, one of the members went to the state Web site and printed the conference proposal form.

***TIP:*** *Paraprofessionals provide another perspective on the effectiveness of improvement efforts and contribute to their sustainability. Be sure to include them in the work of the leadership team and in professional development related to improvement strategies.*

The team had planned a special celebration to acknowledge their accomplishments and to mark the ending of McREL's onsite assistance and the continuation of their journey toward excellent performance.

## SUMMARY OF ACTIONS

In Stage 6, in preparation for the hand-off and exit, McREL focuses the leadership's teams efforts on sustainability by reviewing sustainability indicators and assisting the team in determining their own status related to the indicators. During this stage, the leadership team, with McREL's help, is responsible for developing and implementing a sustainability plan. McREL and the leadership team work collaboratively to develop a plan for handing-off the responsibility for leading improvement to the team and school and exiting the site, and determining appropriate ways for McREL to communicate with the site during the transition.

## TOOL FOR STAGE 6: MEETING ADAPTIVE CHANGES

The Meeting Adaptive Challenges activity (see Exhibit 12) is designed to help teams integrate the skills and strategies learned through the partnership with the external change agent and use these to develop a local "model" for continuous improvement. This experience helps the team to gain confidence in their ability to identify and tackle problems once the change agent leaves. It also helps the team reflect on its previous efforts and tap into existing resources. In addition, the change agent has an opportunity to observe the team's ability to solve problems and assess areas for final guidance if needed.

**Exhibit 12: Meeting Adaptive Challenges**

### The Task

- Think about the following statement:

> "When we face a problem/challenge that we have never dealt with before, this is how we work through it…"

- Using what you know, have learned, or have available in the materials that have been provided during on-site meetings, generate ideas related to the following possible stages of the process. These stages are provided as guidance. If other stages, or labels for the stages, seem more appropriate, feel free to use those instead. Write your ideas on sticky notes, one idea per note.

1. Identifying the Problem/Challenge
2. Developing a Plan of Action
3. Implementing and Monitoring
4. Determining the Level of Success

- Keep the following questions in mind as you generate ideas for the various points in the process:

What are the questions we would want to ask ourselves at this point?

What is the magnitude of change?

What are the steps we would take at this point?

What are the resources/tools we have to help us with this stage?

What are types of support we would need to put in place with this stage? (Consider the following when thinking about this question:)

What are our internal structures for this stage of the process?

Who is generally involved?

What are the communication needs?

How do we make decisions?

Who is responsible for what and how do we hold ourselves accountable?

What do we need to do to manage the change?

What will we need to learn to do the work?

CHAPTER 8

# Supporting School Improvement

As we've seen through the story of Truman Elementary School, success with school improvement doesn't happen overnight and long-term success isn't likely unless certain critical elements are in place. This chapter presents four "big" issues that help schools think about the extent to which these elements are characteristic of them. Each of these sections includes indicators that the element is evident in the school and suggested actions that schools can take to increase the likelihood that their school improvement efforts will bear fruit. The last section of the chapter describes actions that states and districts can take to support schools' improvement efforts.

## SCHOOL AND DISTRICT CAPACITY TO SUPPORT SCHOOL IMPROVEMENT

There are a number of indicators that suggest whether a school/district will be capable of supporting school improvement processes and moving toward the goal of improved student learning. These indicators generally fall under the topic areas of resources; plans and processes; professional development; data use; leadership; and guidance and feedback:

- Sufficient resources to support school improvement
- Enough school control over resources to allocate them in ways that support student learning
- School staff experience in planning, implementing, and evaluating school-based reform efforts
- Clear processes for identifying priorities for improvement
- Clear processes for identifying strategies to address areas that need improvement
- A coherent professional development plan that is tied to school improvement goals
- School access to the data it needs to improve student performance
- School staff knowledge in data use to improve student performance
- School leadership team that meets on a regular basis to carry out its work of leading school improvement
- District guidance and feedback for school improvement planning

To support school improvement, schools and districts should make it a priority to provide professional development about the change process [e.g., involve staff in the Systems Changing/Systems Thinking simulation (Mundry & Bershad, 1997)]. Other ways to support the school improvement process include examining the school's professional development plan to determine if it provides multiple ways for teachers to acquire the skills they need to improve student achievement; establishing a school data team to oversee data collection, analysis, and use in the school; creating a school leadership team that represents the diverse view points in the school; and determining the extent to which resources are being used to support student learning and identifying ways to reallocate resources for this purpose if necessary.

## STABILITY OF SCHOOL LEADERSHIP

Strong and stable leadership is a critical aspect of successful school improvement initiatives. The following indicators suggest that stable leadership is in place:

- Principals stay at their schools for at least three years, unless their performance is harming students and/or teachers
- There are structures, such as Building Leadership Teams, that develop teacher leadership
- Teachers have meaningful opportunities to participate in decision making related to curriculum and instruction

To support the stability of school leadership, districts might consider providing professional development for principals that addresses the leadership responsibilities that are related to high levels of student achievement; providing coaching for struggling principals; and requiring professional growth plans that focus on developing principals' knowledge and skills that are related to building purposeful community. Other options include involving the school's teachers and staff in selecting the principal and establishing structures and procedures for monitoring principal performance and providing support for improvement.

## SHARED PURPOSE AND GOALS RELATED TO IMPROVED STUDENT LEARNING

The importance of a shared purpose and goals for improved student learning — not only between teachers and administrators, but among all staff, parents, and other stakeholders — cannot be underestimated. The following indicators suggest that a school has in place a shared purpose and goals:

- There is a great deal of consistency in how various stakeholder groups describe the purpose and vision of the school.
- The mission statement specifically mentions that the purpose of the school is to help students learn.
- Goals for student learning are clearly articulated, agreed-upon, measurable, attainable, results-oriented, and time bound.

To support the development of a shared purpose and goals related to improved student learning, stakeholders can review existing mission and vision statements to determine the extent to which they focus on student learning and revise if necessary (e.g., does the vision statement clearly describe what curriculum and instruction should look like?); reaffirm their commitment to the mission and vision; determine the extent to which the mission and vision guide decisions in the school, including identification of goals and strategies; identify actions to increase this role if necessary; and identify ways to monitor how well actions align with the mission and vision and implement them.

### COMMITMENT AMONG THE SCHOOL'S STAFF TO SUPPORT THE SCHOOL'S IMPROVMENT EFFORTS

Effective, long-lasting reform cannot occur without sustained efforts from all school staff. The following indicators suggest a staff commitment to support school improvement efforts:

- Staff express willingness to assess strengths and weaknesses related to the factors that are associated with high levels of student achievement
- Staff express willingness to examine existing structures and processes and to make necessary changes
- Staff express willingness to address a variety of issues related to improving student learning, including classroom practices; professional development; and organizational policies, structures and processes
- Staff express willingness to collaborate with colleagues (if they aren't already doing so) within and outside the school to improve student learning
- There is a sense of urgency about the need to improve student learning

There are a number of actions school administrators can take to encourage staff support and ownership of school improvement efforts. These include treating weaknesses as opportunities for growth rather than failures; creating opportunities to talk about the culture of the school and how it supports teacher and student learning; using data to create demand for change; providing examples of schools that have similar challenges and high performance. Other options include identifying and celebrating what has worked, discussing ways to build on strengths, and establishing structures and processes that provide opportunities for teachers to examine current practices and to work collaboratively on a regular basis.

School administrators and teachers need the will and skill to engage in improvement efforts. But they are not likely to sustain their commitment or succeed in the long run without support from the larger system. The next section presents actions the state and district can take to guide and support schools in their efforts to ensure students achieve academic success.

## STATE AND DISTRICT SUPPORT

The No Child Left Behind Act acknowledges the important role that states and districts play in supporting schools' efforts to help all children succeed. The actions listed below are examples of ways that states and districts can take to ensure that the support they provide is the support schools need.

### State Actions

To maximize the impact of their assistance to schools, states should take a systematic approach that views districts and schools as learners and begins by taking stock of the district context to determine what assistance is needed most. This includes asking questions about the district's previous experience with change, where their strengths are, and relationships among staff. It also includes listening for challenges they face, what they've tried, and where there have been successes. This approach will help the state with the small steps that are needed at first to scaffold schools' and districts' learning. The state can help districts and schools build capacity for long-term improvement by taking the following actions:

- Focus on using data. Help schools and districts get data in a timely fashion, provide them with guidance and processes for looking at data, templates for analyzing data, and examples of analyzed and reported data.
- Identify schools and districts that others can visit. Provide many opportunities for districts and schools to share their successes and struggles (e.g., online, at conferences). Be honest about where schools are struggling; don't think that a school or district has to have everything perfect before you can share information about them.
- Provide appropriate training for School Support Team members and/or Intermediate Service Agency staff that helps them acquire the knowledge and skills they need to assist schools.
- Send consistent messages to schools and districts about expectations and where to get help.

### District Actions

Similar to states, districts can support schools in their improvement efforts by sending clear, consistent messages about expectations for improvement. This entails developing and using a common language around improvement, following through on promises of support, and checking that expectations are being met. It is particularly important for the district to take a system-wide (not just some schools) and systemic (attend to curriculum, instruction, assessment, professional development, resource allocation, and community involvement) approach to school improvement. Specifically, the district should provide guidance (e.g., templates and examples) on how to develop an effective school improvement plan and provide schools with feedback on their improvement plans. To help all schools succeed, the district should provide instructional and other support at the school level, differentiating as appropriate based on schools' individual needs.

One way the district can provide support to schools is to ensure curricular coherence. This can be accomplished by adopting content standards for students, making sure all teachers have a copy of the standards and know how to use them to design lessons and units, and eliminating gaps and overlaps in the curriculum. Other actions the district can take to support schools' success include the following:

- Send consistent messages and be clear about expectations for improvement; develop and use a common language around improvement. Follow through on promises of support and check that expectations are being met.
- Ensure that the data management system is operating efficiently and that there is sufficient technology to support data collection, analysis, and use. Verify that schools have, and know how to use, the data they need to improve student achievement. Establish a district data team to oversee data collection, analysis, and use in the district. Model how to use data to make decisions about program effectiveness and student achievement.
- Devote appropriate resources to professional development. Provide a range of professional development opportunities for teachers and principals and set the expectation that teachers and principals are expected to use what they learn in professional development. Provide guidance and feedback to schools on professional development planning.
- Provide opportunities for schools to share their successes; don't ostracize those who have made progress or who are pushing the system because they have been involved in learning experiences outside the district.
- Conduct a policy audit to determine if policies hinder or support school's efforts to improve. Model willingness to examine, and make necessary changes in, programs, policies, and practices.

Many schools are facing unprecedented challenges in helping all students gain the knowledge and skills they need to succeed as citizens and workers. Fortunately, schools are not alone in facing these challenges. Research has shown where it is most important for them to focus their improvement efforts and how leaders can guide the process. And as we've seen through the story of Truman Elementary School, the *Success in Sight* process provides a systematic and systemic way to achieve short-term and long-term improvement. More than that, it builds capacity for improvement that provides hope for those who might have thought that the challenges of today are too great and those of tomorrow might be impossible to face.

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