State Systems Change Spotlight: Nevada

Challenge: How do we develop and use a communication protocol to connect stakeholders to the work to sustain and scale-up initiatives?

Data show that effective and ongoing communication and evaluation can have a positive impact on local and statewide systems change.[1] Local and statewide systems change requires ongoing communication and evaluation. The Nevada Department of Education (NDE) used a communication protocol to support implementation of the Assess-Plan-Teach (APT) model. This state spotlight focuses on the development and implementation of a communication protocol that NDE used to connect stakeholders to the work, and to sustain and scale-up initiatives.

State Context

Nevada's Part B State-Identified Measurable Result (SIMR) focuses on improving the literacy achievement of third-grade students with disabilities. It does so by building school districts' capacity to strengthen special education teachers' skills in assessment, instructional planning, and teaching. The SIMR targets 25 pilot schools in Clark County School District (CCSD), the state's largest district. To make progress toward the SIMR, NDE capitalized on CCSD's existing APT instructional model. The model incorporates a structured, data-based consultation model and training on research-based, explicit, systematic instruction and lesson plan development. Successful implementation of any large-scale initiative requires clear communication and effective problem solving across all levels of the system, from the school level to the state level.[1] NDE identified two problem areas: there was a need to (1) increase timely communication and (2) resolve pressing implementation problems occurring at the

> *Public School Facts: Nevada*
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> Districts: 18
> Schools: 705
> Students: 467,527
> Students with Individualized Education Programs: 11.75%

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[1] Fixsen, D. L., Naoom, S. F., Blase, K. A., Friedman, R. M,, & Wallace, F. (2005). *Implementation research: A synthesis of the literature*. Retrieved from http://ctndisseminationlibrary.org/PDF/nirnmonograph.pdf

school level. NDE's solution was to create a communication protocol strategy for collecting communication information, as a source of data on implementation challenges and successes across the 25 pilot sites. The communication protocol enabled NDE to create a process to continuously evaluate APT implementation.

Strategies for Success

NDE used a multi-step approach to develop the communication protocol and ensure that administrators were actively engaged throughout the development and implementation of the process. NDE took the following steps:

- *Created an APT leadership team.* NDE established an APT leadership team comprising state and district leaders. The team's role was to guide all efforts related to implementing APT, including the development and use of the communication protocol.

- *Clarified the purpose of the communication protocol.* The protocol ensured bi-directional communication between staff who work at the school level (i.e., teachers who implement APT and building-level administrators) and staff who work at the district and state levels (e.g., district coaches, district special education directors, the state special education director). Information communicated within and across levels served as data about implementation challenges and successes. Thus, the protocol facilitated open and timely communication between the pilot schools and the APT leadership team.

- *Developed the communication protocol with stakeholder input and consensus.* The APT leadership team and the principals co-created the communication protocol; stakeholders had multiple opportunities to provide feedback and make revisions. Together, they created a protocol that explicitly identified what data needed to be collected and communicated, how and when data were communicated, and who was responsible for communicating the information.

- *Used the protocol to continuously improve implementation efforts.* NDE's next step was to ensure that the protocol was used. Over the course of several months, principals provided data and the APT leadership team examined that information to guide discussions about the challenges that principals communicated. Data from the protocol were used to celebrate successes and to resolve implementation challenges; this enabled NDE to engage in a problem-solving cycle so implementation efforts resulted in the desired outcomes.

After a year of implementation, NDE remains committed to using the communication protocol as a centerpiece in accomplishing their SIMR. The protocol was critical to implementing APT successfully because teachers used it to express their needs (e.g., coaching, training, materials) to the APT leadership team. Overall, both principals and the APT leadership team had access to the data they

needed to make implementation decisions. As the APT leadership team continues to learn about implementation successes, challenges, possible solutions to challenges, and pilot site needs, they can engage in meaningful evaluation of the State Systemic Improvement Plan (SSIP).

The APT leadership team used feedback to make decisions about coaching, training, and topic areas for the fall principals meeting for the upcoming school year. The team also used data from the 25 pilot sites to help plan for scaling-up APT for the eight new sites that will implement the APT model in the 2017–18 school year.

Recommendations for States Facing Similar Challenges

- Consider multiple uses for the communication protocol (e.g., identifying common barriers to implementation for problem solving, celebrating successes) to guide development of the protocol.

- Establish a leadership team and engage stakeholders (e.g., principals) to build buy-in, because they are directly involved in the development of important processes and actively involved in critical discussions.

- Use the various kinds of support that technical assistance facilitators can offer, such as outside perspectives, to move development forward more efficiently.

- Develop a quick timeline for sites to submit the protocol to the leadership team to facilitate a timely feedback loop and the sharing of data.

Resources

- National Center for Systemic Improvement (NCSI), Technical Assistance State Facilitators (Find your state on the map)
- Contact NCSI Systems Change team member Jennifer Pierce (jpierce@air.org) for information on developing a communication protocol
- The National Implementation Research Network's Active Implementation Hub, Lesson 9: Communication Protocol and Communication Protocol Worksheet

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