

In education “readiness for change” is something that needs to be developed, nurtured, and sustained. Readiness is not a pre-existing condition waiting to be found or an enduring characteristic of a person, organization, or system. The same person, organization, or system can be in the Full Implementation stage with respect to one innovation and in the Exploration Stage for a different innovation. Accountability for creating readiness rests with the implementation team, not with those who are expected or invited to change.

The purpose of the State Implementation & Scaling-up of Evidence-based Practices (SISEP) Center is to help States establish adequate capacity to carry out effective implementation, organizational change, and systems transformation strategies to maximize the academic achievement and behavioral health outcomes of students statewide.

Readiness for Change

THE PURPOSE OF THIS *BRIEF* is to define the variables a state or large district leadership team may wish to consider as they determine if they are “ready” to invest in the scaling-up of an innovation in education. As defined here, “scaling up” means that at least 60% of the students who could benefit from an innovation have access to that innovation in schools across a State. Creating benefits to students on a comprehensive scale requires considerable change by teachers, building staff, district staff, and state leaders. “Readiness” is defined as a developmental point at which a person, organization, or system has the capacity and willingness to engage in a particular activity. Creating readiness for change is a critical component of both initiating and scaling up the use of evidence-based practices and other innovations in education.

Readiness is an under-emphasized part of the implementation process. Proceeding with implementation prematurely can lead to both ineffective and expensive implementation efforts. In some cases, leadership or management teams within an organization or system have fully explored a “change initiative” and have decided on a course of action. The same leaders and managers then are surprised when collaborators, staff, or colleagues display what some call “resistance to change.” “Resistance” occurs when people are asked prematurely to move to action. They are “resistant to change” because they are not “ready for change.” We frame below the core elements of readiness, and place the role of “readiness for change” in the larger context of implementation stages.

Stages of Implementation

In the Stages of Implementation outlined below, creating readiness for change occurs primarily during the Exploration Stage but is part of the other Stages as well. Keep in mind that the Stages of Implementation are not linear. For example, Sustainability is embedded in the activities in each Stage (e.g., readiness has a big influence on sustainability), and many schools and districts may move into and out of Stages

over time (e.g., oscillate between Exploration and Installation and Initial Implementation as early attempts to use and support an innovation fail). Implementation teams (see *Scaling-up Brief #1*) are essential for carrying out the Stages of Implementation effectively and efficiently for a variety of innovations within a State. With their repeated experiences, implementation teams become quite skillful at creating readiness within key stakeholder and community groups.

The Stages of Implementation are:

Exploration – identifying the need for change, learning about possible interventions that may be solutions, learning about what it takes to implement the innovation effectively, developing stakeholders and champions, deciding to proceed

Installation – establishing the resources needed to use an innovation and resources required to implement the innovation with fidelity and good outcomes for students

Initial Implementation – the first use of an innovation by newly trained teachers and others working in a school and district environment that is just learning how to support the new ways of teaching (sometimes referred to as the “awkward stage”)

Full Implementation – the skillful use of an innovation well-integrated into the repertoire of

teachers and routinely supported by building and district administrations

Innovation – the advances in knowledge and skill that come from evaluated changes in how teachers and others make use of a science-based intervention

Sustainability – persistent and skillful support for teachers and staff who are using an innovation effectively, with each cohort of teachers achieving better results than the last. This sometimes is referred to as “regeneration” defined as “the set of procedures that allow a system to continually compare valued outcomes against current practice and modify practices to continue to achieve valued outcomes as the context changes over time.”

As one might expect, Full Implementation may be reached more quickly for some innovations while others take longer. However, 2 to 5 years is a typical time frame to achieve Full Implementation for many science-based interventions and other innovations.

Creating Readiness for Change

Creating “readiness for change” is an active component of the Exploration Stage. During the Exploration Stage, individuals typically need more information and time to process what the needs are, and what the innovation or change might mean for them. Encouragement, incentives, or demands to “just do it” typically do not lead to the “action” hoped for by the leaders or management team. What is needed is relevant and detailed information so those who are being asked to change are “ready” for change.

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Creating readiness for scaling up evidence-based practices in education is not a simple matter. Given the breadth, depth, intensity, and duration of the efforts involved in scaling up innovations to reach students in schools state-wide (see *Scaling-up Brief #2*), States need to “be ready” along a number of dimensions:

- Identification and validation of need
- Consideration of required changes
- Planning for change
- Communication plan
- Implementation plan
- Data collection and reporting plan

Each of these dimensions is outlined below. The time required to “be ready for change” will vary from State to State and from issue to issue. The support available to States also will impact the time needed to create readiness for change. With skillful guidance from an implementation team, creating readiness for change may take only a year or so. In other cases, issues may have to persist for several years before they “come to a head” and prompt greater attention to creating readiness for change.

1. Identification of need. Scaling up requires recognition of a clear need for comprehensive change. Unless the needs are clear and there is dissatisfaction with the current state of affairs, the State Management Team and major stakeholders will not have sufficient motivation to fully participate in a multi-year process of changing education in classrooms, districts, and overall system functions. A State Management Team may include the Chief State School Officer, Directors of General and Special Education, Director of Curriculum and Instruction, Director of Evaluation, and Director of Finance and Administration.

- a. The need for change must be substantial enough and broad enough to merit using the energy and resources that are required for scaling up innovations.

- b. The need for change needs to be validated with data or broad consensus in order to stimulate sustained action.

2. Consideration of change. The impetus for change can come from any quarter (e.g., disasters, law suits, data about current results, data about new possibilities, changes in leadership). Whatever the source of interest in change, State Management Teams and major stakeholders need considerable information about issues, innovations, implementation methods, risks, and benefits in order to contemplate change on this scale and to envision a different future.

- a. Convening groups at practice, policy, and management levels is an important part of preparing for change. The idea of “requisite variety” is relevant here – that is, greater diversity of roles, functions, and opinions in the room for discussions results in more complete views of “the problem” and better decisions about “the solution.”
- b. Consideration of alternatives is a key part of getting ready for change. Prioritizing needs and initiatives is very important. Better to do a few things well with good outcomes for students than have multiple under-resourced initiatives that have little chance for success.
- c. Readiness includes consideration of the feasibility of change. The resources need to be available to implement and create the capacity to sustain the innovation over time.
- d. In some cases the State Leadership Team will have encouraged some schools to make use of the innovation to determine whether it can be implemented with fidelity and good outcomes (see “transformation zones” in *Scaling-up Brief #1*). Readiness for scaling-up is enhanced by having practical examples of success available to those considering change.

- e. State leaders should require that any innovation considered for scaling-up provide empirical demonstration of effectiveness. The criterion for documenting impact may vary depending on the innovation and outcome measures, but a general guideline is demonstration of at least a 0.50 “effect size” within an experimental trial (e.g., in general terms, an effect size of 1.00 means that the students who received an innovation achieved two times greater benefit than their counterparts who were in typical classrooms). Scaling up needs to be “worth it” in terms of benefits to students, families, and communities.

3. Planning for change. As the State Management Team and major stakeholders move from Exploration to Installation, readiness for change depends upon the State Management Team having a plan to initiate the change process and a plan for managing the change process once it begins.

- a. Comprehensive change is fraught with risks. State Management Teams need to anticipate the risks involved and have a plan to manage risks, issues, and surprises that inevitably emerge from the change process.
- b. Any plan for change should assume that schools have some practices already in place that are valued. Change should supplement what already works, not supplant efforts that are valued, working for some, and hard won. Scaling-up requires a process by which a school team can (1) self-assess core features that are or are not in place, (2) adapt the innovation to fit the local context while retaining the core features, and (3) incorporate implementation investment in sustainability and local capacity at every stage of the process. Implementation teams are skilled in these areas and are very helpful to integrating initiatives and preparing for scaling up.

- C. As part of the Planning dimension, implementation teams should provide a “readiness checklist” that can be used by local school/district teams to help guide them in assessing and building readiness. Elements of a readiness checklist will assess if (1) the outcome of an innovation is highly valued, (2) there is consensus that a need exists for the innovation, (3) the innovation is evidence-based and already in use locally, (4) a practical and cost-effective process for implementation is defined, and (5) adequate evaluation tools are available to assess both fidelity and impact.

4. Communication plan. A critical component of successful system change is frequent and accurate communication between the practice level and the policy level (see *Scaling-up Brief #1*). The State Management Team and major stakeholders need to be in a position to quickly adjust policies and regulations to eliminate barriers and strengthen facilitators of change at the teacher, building, district, and bureaucracy levels.

- a. Rapid feedback cycles (weekly, monthly communication) allow adjustments to be made to quickly remove risks, correct errors, and maximize benefits to students, and to align system structures, roles, and functions to support teachers and building administrators in their use of innovations in education.
- b. Adaptive leadership during the comprehensive change process convenes stakeholders at regular intervals regarding the vision, plan, and anticipated results, and to identify issues and concerns that arise.

5. Implementation plan. The State Management Team and major stakeholders need to be ready to effectively implement desired changes at the classroom, building, district, and bureaucracy levels. Coherent and comprehensive change is not done for

its own sake—it is done to bring about and support effective ways of work that improve educational outcomes for students. Few States have an infrastructure for effective implementation of evidence-based programs or other innovations. The State Management Team and major stakeholders in the education system must be prepared to develop this capacity to ensure sustainable system change to support new practices.

- a. Comprehensive implementation strategies need to be in place to effectively and efficiently help teachers and others make use of education innovations to benefit students. This typically means investing in (a) building local capacity for on-going training, (b) developing and supporting a cadre of coaches who can facilitate implementation, (c) organizing a formal plan of evaluation that emphasizes fidelity as well as student outcomes, and (d) regular and repeated professional development experiences for faculty and staff who are engaged in the day-to-day implementation efforts.

6. Data collection and reporting plan.

The State Management Team and major stakeholders need to be ready to establish reliable, valid, and trusted indicators of progress that are fully accessible to the State Management Team and major stakeholders involved in the comprehensive change process. The data and indicators can reflect incremental changes in benefits to students and others, reductions in critical issues, and benefits to society. The data and indicators also need to include measures of the development of an infrastructure (e.g., trainers, coaches, evaluation system) for implementation.

- a. Information and data from the successes and issues raised at the level of implementation of innovations are part of the weekly/ monthly feedback to the State Management Team so they can align system roles and functions to more effectively support the implementation of innovations at the practice levels.

- b. Effective scaling-up of educational innovations will require data collection that is directly useful to the local implementers. Self-assessment tools may be linked with more formal external evaluation efforts to allow school, district and state teams to progress monitor their implementation efforts.

ness for change applies at all levels, from the State Management Team to teachers and staff and all those in between, and includes major stakeholders in the process as well. The capacity to create readiness for change, manage the change process, implement innovations effectively, and establish reliable and enduring indicators of progress is largely missing in nearly all State education systems. Creating this infrastructure is an essential part of effectively using evidence-based programs and other innovations to benefit students in classrooms across a State. As teachers, staff, administrators, policy makers, and leaders come and go, creating readiness for change is an on-going activity if science-based interventions and other innovations are to be scaled up and sustained to benefit students statewide for decades to come. 🍏



Conclusion

Readiness for change is an important consideration in any effort to increase the effective use of evidence-based programs and other innovations in education. Readiness can be developed and sustained with thoughtful activities that are sensitive to individuals' needs for relevant information and involvement in decision making. Creating readi-



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