

Common Principles of Effective Practice (CPEP) and Implementation:
A Framework for Integrating Initiatives and Sustaining Evidence-based Practices

Leadership Through an Implementation Lens

Management is doing things right; leadership is doing the right things. - Peter F. Drucker

What do we mean by leadership through an implementation lens?

There are many definitions of leadership. Volumes have been written about everything from leadership functions, to leadership styles, to leadership challenges. This brief focuses on leadership functions and frameworks through an implementation lens. More specifically, this means a focus on leadership strategies and functions that promote change and support sustainable, high-fidelity implementation of evidence-based educational programs and innovations. The brief also highlights the work of Ron Heifitz and his colleagues and their definition and strategies related to technical and adaptive leadership. His work addresses the complexity and multi-level efforts (at the classroom, school, community, district, and state levels) required to institute and sustain educational change. The reference at the end of this brief provides more information on Heifitz's leadership framework.

Why is leadership through an implementation lens important?

Change is difficult – sometimes even painful – and there are many points along the way for plans to be derailed or abandoned. Leadership is required to help hold the vision in tough times while creating space and safety for people to operate outside their current thinking and work habits. A clear vision, consensus on values, data-based and transparent decision-making, problem-solving and feedback loops, are all necessary leadership processes if we are to achieve significant educational and systems change that can only take place over a period of years. Committed and skillful leadership can mean the difference between progress toward the goals rather than abandoning challenging goals in favor of “easier” targets or the “next new educational fad.”

What are the key elements of leadership to consider in this context?

Leading others through the change process to reach targeted results (fidelity and student outcomes) at every level (e.g., school, district, state) requires leadership that:

- Recognizes and values formal and informal leaders that support change and implementation.
- Ensures the development of an aligned organizational vision to serve as a “touchstone” for the work ahead.
- Fosters the development of innovation competency at multiple levels by sustaining and evaluating the quality of the *Core Implementation Components*.

- Ensures that facilitative administrative practices exist (e.g., policies, funding, administrative supports) to remove barriers and promote high fidelity implementation.
- Uses data to define problems, measure implementation, and assess outcomes.
- Anticipates, recognizes, analyzes and monitors the systemic impacts of decisions at multiple levels (e.g., classroom, school, community, district, state).
- Communicates strengths and identifies barriers and potential solutions at multiple levels (e.g., with state education agencies, within the district, with schools, with the community).
- Selects and uses leadership strategies to match the type of challenge that has surfaced (e.g., technical and/or adaptive).

What are indicators of successful leadership through an implementation lens?

- Staff at all levels know the mission, vision, values of the organizations (e.g., school, district, state).
- Common core outcomes are shared and aligned from schools, to district, to state.
- Staff at all levels are encouraged to raise issues, suggest solutions, and participate in solving problems.
- The number of individuals who are fluent in an innovation (e.g., understand what it takes to implement it and how to measure process and outcomes) increases over time.
- Each policy, funding and regulatory decision is evaluated through multiple lenses:
 - How will this decision impact student outcomes?
 - How will this decision support teacher confidence and competence?
 - How will this decision support school building administrators in developing teacher confidence and competence?
 - How will this decision impact the effective use of the *Core Implementation Components*?
 - How does this decision align with the current stage of implementation?
 - How is this decision constrained by or supported by the system?
- Data are used to help define problems and chart success.
- Data are used to monitor implementation (e.g. did we do what we intended to do?).
- Data are used to evaluate the impact of decisions.

- Communication protocols are developed to create feedback loops from teachers to school administrators, from school administrators to district staff, and from districts to the state education agency and back again.
- Principles for leading adaptive work are used when adaptive challenges arise.

What are some key systems change requirements for leadership in the context of implementation?

- Leadership must have access to and must use data systems that are reliable, valid, practical and timely. If a data system is not in place, one may need to be developed in order to inform decision-making.
- Leadership must shape a system that builds in sufficient time for planning, review of progress and determining the next right steps in the change process.
- Leadership must set a clear expectation and tone that feedback between “levels” is needed, welcomed, and will be acted upon. This requires agreement among and across individuals at various levels including the classroom, school, district and state.

References

Heifetz, R., and Linsky, M. (2002). *Leadership on the Line: Staying Alive through the Dangers of Leading*. Boston, MA: Harvard Business School Press.