Capacity Building for Whole System Reform

(Fullan & Quinn, 2010)

Mobilizing and sustaining improvement across whole systems requires both capacity and systems for improvement at all levels.

Capacity refers to capability of the individual or organization to make the changes required and involves the development of knowledge, skills and commitments.

Collective capacity building involves the increased ability of educators at all levels of the system to make the instructional changes required to raise the bar and close the gap for all students.

Conditions

A Capacity Building approach requires a shift in thinking in 6 key areas we have identified as conditions that create a foundation for sustainable improvement.

- 1. **Develop collective capacity to impact results**. Strategies to build new capacities focus on developing a common base of knowledge, set of skills and commitment to connect roles and mobilize action at all levels of the system including state levels. It is crucial that strategies are based on teachers working together as teams to learn from evidence on student learning. It is this collective capacity in addition to individual capacity that has the greatest impact on learning.
- 2. **Reframe perspective create collective focus**. Shift from the mindset of multiple state level departments and agencies offering piecemeal services and accountability to focused and coherent capacity building at all levels in order to support and drive local implementation.
- 3. **Reduce distracters**. Ensure that schools and districts concentrate relentlessly on instructional improvement. Focus state, district and schools efforts on a small number of priorities (3-4). Reduce distracters by removing competing priorities, non- essential paperwork and demands that draw focus and time from the work in the classroom, school and community.
- 4. **Shift the balance of capacity building and accountability**. The current emphasis on elaborate accountability measures, performance review protocols, extensive improvement plans etc. dominates the time of leaders. The majority of district/school leaders and teacher's time must be spent increasing their ability to impact student learning. Data are used primarily to make improvements. Transparency and targeted intervention is used to build capacity and hold people accountable.
- 5. **Constantly develop knowledge and skills**. A common base of knowledge and set of skills is identified. The knowledge and skills are tailored and applied across specific roles and levels in the system. Effective learning processes incorporate learning teams where the design includes the continuous infusion of new knowledge with opportunities to practice the skills on the job and then return to the learning team to share results.
- 6. **Foster mutual allegiance and collaborative competition**. Building lateral connections for dialogue and learning across and within roles, schools, districts and states deepens the shared knowledge base and acts as a catalyst for new thinking and deeper levels of implementation. Participants become committed to each other and to the success of the whole system while also being stimulated to higher levels of achievement as they try to outdo their previous performance and compete constructively with each other.

Capacity Building for Whole System Reform – High Leverage Strategies

Six high leverage capacity building strategies are highly impactful in mobilizing and sustaining improvement across all levels of the system.

Instructional Precision. Improvement in the quality of instruction is at the heart of improved results. Instructional precision is facilitated by implementing a process for teachers to collaborate on designing and assessing quality instruction. Teachers in grade level teams/ department teams/clusters meet regularly to review data, identify curriculum standards for a unit of work, design pre and post assessments, design instruction, collaboratively assess student work and refine the next instructional goal.

Coaches/Master teachers/Student Success Teachers. The addition of these key roles in the school fosters the development of instructional precision by having on site expertise who facilitate the examination of student wok cycles, model and coach.

School-wide Instructional and Assessment Practices. A common language and set of school wide practices across grades and departments increases consistency and precision.

Professional Learning. A sustained series of learning cycles is designed for each role at the state, district and school level. **Learning cycles** include sessions to introduce new knowledge and skills, an opportunity to practice during the session, and time to develop a plan to use the new learning at the work site.

In subsequent sessions, participants return with evidence of application on the job and share with colleagues. This deep learning across roles, schools and districts accelerates impact as they build a bank of strategies that work in their context. States and Districts identify core instructional and assessment strategies that become the common language and set of skills for every role.

Curriculum and Assessment. A common curriculum and related set of assessments is the foundation for instructional precision. Relevant data is provided to schools and teachers in user friendly formats.

Resources. A coherent set of resources which model the use of the core instructional and assessment practices are made available through print, video, web casts, etc. These resources become the foundation for professional learning cycles with all roles. The use of common language and skills increases consistency, precision and impact. The development of these resources by state/district expert educators has been significantly more effective than purchasing commercial products and holds great potential for sharing best resources across states and districts.

Capacity Building for Whole System Reform - Components

Sustainable change is fostered by developing common language and skills at all levels of leadership: State, District and School.

The Federal level coordinates and integrates capacity building programs and resources through an Implementation Support Unit. They declutter the technical and regional support system.

The State establishes structures to propel and support districts and schools.

Districts establish structures and support for schools.

FederalStateDistrict			

Federal Guiding Coalition	State Guiding Coalition	District Leadership	School Leadership Team
Coordinates and integrates capacity building programs Declutters the technical and regional support system	 Establishes priorities for the state Establishes structures and resources to support districts and schools Designs and manages the implementation of the goal areas Identifies and supports a state capacity team to support districts. 	Designs and manages the implementation Directs the work of the district capacity team	Establishes a school plan and targets Designs and delivers in school professional learning
Federal Support Unit	State Capacity Team	District Capacity Team	Teachers
• Provides integrated support and service to the states	Collaborates with district leaders to create a partnership for improvement Provides advice and support to district to establish targets and plans Designs and delivers capacity building sessions in regions for: state colleagues, district capacity teams, school leadership teams, and teachers in collaboration with districts Creates a bank of statewide resources Monitors progress with districts	Establishes a partnership for improvement with schools Collaborates with principals to establish targets & plans Provides advice & support to school teams Designs and delivers capacity building sessions for school leadership teams and teachers Assists with resources Monitors progress	• Participates in professional communities to practice and apply new knowledge and skills