

## STEP FIVE: ESTABLISH IMPROVEMENT OBJECTIVES



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**Facilitator:** The team will be relieved to be talking about solutions and may have strategies in mind. Keep team members from rushing ahead. Teams often think of improvements the school has already planned or those most in vogue. Push the group to think beyond “easy answers.” Make sure they brainstorm thoroughly before writing the improvement objective.

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**I**n Step 4, the planning team identified possible causes of students' lack of knowledge and skills. Now it will select which causes to address in the plan and begin to develop solutions for improving student achievement. From the causes identified, the team will develop improvement objectives that explicitly describe the change it wishes to make in students' learning experiences.

When identifying causes, the team started at the micro level, looking at individual skills and areas of knowledge, and from there moved to more macro levels, thinking about issues that affect whole content areas and multiple content areas. In Step 5 the team begins at the macro level. It will first identify the changes it would like to make in the learning experiences for students across all content areas. Then it will determine what additional changes need to be made in the individual content areas. Finally, it will determine what further changes need to be made to address the specific skills and knowledge in the student learning objectives. Because the plan should be integrated, there is not need to repeat any strategies at a micro level if they are addressed at a more macro level. Similarly, if targeting all students, the team will first develop improvement objectives for the whole population. Then when working at the

subgroup level the team needs only to include improvement objectives describing the supports the school will provide in addition to what is planned for all students.

## Expectations for this step

- Teams will identify the most significant causes to address.
- Teams will consult key resources regarding ways to address the identified causes.
- Teams will develop improvement objectives describing the learning experiences students need to improve student performance.

### Tool Kit

#### Worksheets

5-A Improvement objectives (Word)

5-B Resources needed for developing improvement objectives (Word)

#### Other Materials and Equipment

Newsprint

Appendix A: Documenting the plan (School Improvement Plan Template, PIM Access Database, or an alternate format)

Completed copies of Worksheet 4-C (Causes related to a student learning objective), Worksheet 4-D (Causes related to one content area), and Worksheet 4-E (Causes related to all content areas)

## 5.1 Select which causes to address in the plan

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**Facilitator:** Once the team decides which causes to address, have one person transcribe them on to Worksheet 5-A while the team continues working.

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**Guiding Question: Which causes are most urgent to address and should take priority in the current planning process?**

- 1. Beginning with all students, if applicable, look at the causes on Worksheet 4-E (Causes related to all content areas). Ask:**
  - Which causes were verified with evidence?
  - Which causes rate highest on level of impact and control?
  - Are there causes that must be addressed first in order to address other causes?
- 2. Based on the answers to these questions, select the most significant causes to address. Then ask:**
  - Are there two or more causes that are closely related that should be combined or addressed together? (If combining two or more closely related causes, be careful not to combine them in ways that over-generalize them. Causes may also be written separately, but grouped together.)
- 3. Record the most significant causes in the first column on Worksheet 5-A (Improvement objectives).**
- 4. Ask the above questions again while looking at the causes on Worksheet 4-D (Causes related to one content area), and record the significant causes on a new copy of Worksheet 5-A. Again, repeat the process with the causes on Worksheet 4-C (Causes**

related to a student learning objective) and another copy of **Worksheet 5-A**.

5. Repeat the process for the other student groups. The team should now have, on multiple copies of **Worksheet 5-A**, a complete set of the issues it will consider for the rest of the planning process.

### 5.3 Set improvement objectives to address the causes of poor student achievement

**Guiding Question: Based on the causes of poor student achievement, what experiences do students need in order to improve their performance? What resources should be consulted to better understand the causes identified?**

Now that the team has carefully defined the problems it faces and identified the most significant causes of those problems, it will begin thinking about possible solutions.

An improvement objective is a descriptive statement of the most important learning experiences the school wants its students to receive that directly address the cause of low student performance identified in Step 4. Good improvement objectives:

- Clearly describe the learning experience the school wants its students to receive.
- View learning from the students' point of view, because they focus on what students need rather than what adults need.
- Directly address the cause of low student performance.

- Clearly describe to the reader (especially fellow teachers) what will be different from past practice.
- Illustrate observable changes in the condition of teaching and learning whenever possible.

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**Facilitator:** Team members will likely raise ideas for specific strategies. Record them under “key brainstorm elements”, but urge the group to consider what learning experiences for students would result from the implementation of these strategies. In Step 7 the team can revisit this list of potential strategies.

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- 1. Start with the causes listed on [Worksheet 5-A \(Improvement objectives\)](#) for all content areas.**
- 2. Taking each cause individually, think about what learning experiences the school would like to offer students in order to address this cause. Brainstorm what the ideal learning situation would look like from the students’ point of view. Be creative and do not worry yet about what is realistic. Record these ideas on a piece of newsprint.**
- 3. Consider the list of experiences that were generated. Ask:**
  - Which of these experiences are the most critical to improving student learning?
- 4. Record these experiences on [Worksheet 5-A](#) under “Key brainstorm elements.” Next, ask:**
  - What is the general theme in the experiences the school hopes to offer students?
  - How might this theme be summarized in a way that addresses the cause(s) identified?
- 5. Record the general experience the school would like to offer students on [Worksheet 5-A](#) under “Improvement objective.” The**

statement, which may be written in one sentence or a few sentences, does not need to be exhaustive; however, it should describe the new learning experience in a way that is clear to the rest of the staff.

6. If appropriate, use the space provided on the bottom of **Worksheet 5-A** to write a rationale for the improvement objective chosen. The team may want to explain how it prioritized from among the particular brainstorm elements used to craft its improvement objective or why it feels the improvement objective will be different from past practice.
7. The team may find that it does not possess the expertise needed to choose the right learning experience and may need to talk with others in the district or consult additional resources outside the district. Use **Worksheet 5-B (Resources needed for developing improvement objectives)** to record information the team needs to gather, where it will look for it, who will be responsible for gathering it, and when that information will be due. Once it has collected this information, the team will complete or refine its improvement objectives.
8. Repeat the process for causes in each individual content area and record the improvement objective on additional copies of **Worksheet 5-A**.

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**IMPORTANT:** Remember not to repeat any improvement objectives already set on [Worksheet 5-A](#) for all content areas, as this would create unnecessary duplication in the plan.

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**Facilitator:** If causes addressed in 5.3 above require fundamental changes to curriculum and instruction in the school, the team may need to address them before developing strategies to target individual student learning objectives. In this case the school may delay creating plans for student learning objectives. The team must document its rationale and when it will revisit that part of the plan.

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- 9. Now that the broader causes of low student achievement have been addressed, consider the causes of why students have not mastered the specific skills in the student learning objectives.**

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10. Repeat the process described in Step 5.3 for each cause listed on the copies of **Worksheet 5-A** for each student learning objective.

Table 5.1: Improvement objectives (English language arts example)

Cause	Improvement objective
<b>Student learning objective (All students will know / be able to read grade level text fluently and with comprehension (7.10))</b>	
The school lacks supplementary reading interventions for students who do not make adequate progress through regular classroom instruction.	Students who fail to make adequate progress in reading will receive individual reading support from a trained reading teacher in addition to their regular ELA class time.
<b>English language arts</b>	
Although teachers have been trained in the components of the school's adopted literacy model, they have not received adequate support in applying the individual activities purposefully as an integrated program tailored to individual student's needs.	Students will receive instruction tailored to their reading levels through delivery of the school's adopted literacy model by teachers who understand the purpose and appropriate use of the instructional methods.
<b>All content areas</b>	
Teacher supervision and evaluation is not used to guide professional development.	Students will receive high quality instruction from teachers who have opportunities to apply their areas of instructional expertise and are supported in their areas of instructional weaknesses.

Table 5.2: Improvement objectives (Mathematics example)

Cause	Improvement objective
<b>Student learning objective (All students will know / be able to estimate and compute with fractions, including simplification of fractions (8.N.10))</b>	
Special Education teachers use manipulatives to help students understand the concept of parts to whole, but lack a variety of strategies for teaching computational skills involving fractions.	Students will practice computing with fractions in real-life applications using manipulatives and will discuss processes for solving fraction problems as a class, in small groups, and in writing.
<b>Mathematics</b>	
Special Education students in the pull-out math program are taught a different curriculum and are not receiving instruction in all grade level standards.	Students will receive instruction on all grade-level math standards.

**Table 5.2: Improvement objectives (Mathematics example)**

Cause	Improvement objective
<b>Student learning objective (All students will know / be able to estimate and compute with fractions, including simplification of fractions (8.N.10))</b>	
<b>All content areas</b>	
Special Education teachers teach multiple content areas and do not have sufficient content expertise in all the areas they teach.	Students will receive instruction from teachers who have sufficient content knowledge to adapt curriculum and differentiate the instruction of specific concepts as necessary to meet student needs.

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**IMPORTANT:** Again, do not repeat any improvement objectives already set for one or multiple content areas.

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## 5.4 Incorporate information and data from Steps 1-5 into the written plan

**Guiding Question: What goals and objectives were chosen as the focus of the plan?**

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**NOTE:** For instructions on using the PIM Access Database, click “Getting Started” on the main menu or click the “Help” button within any form.

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- 1. If the team has decided to use the [School Improvement Plan Template](#) and/or the [PIM Access Database](#) to document its plan, enter the following information:**
  - From Step 2: Student performance goals (if using the PIM Access Database)
  - From Step 3: Student learning objectives
  - From Step 5: Prioritized causes that will be addressed
  - From Step 5: Improvement objectives
- 2. Reflect on the decisions the planning team made, and ask:**
  - Does the plan address the most important problems the school faces and the most important changes the school needs to make?
  - Is the scope of the list of objectives rigorous yet realistic for the school to undertake?
  - Will the objectives listed be sufficient to allow the school to reach its goals?

3. Based on this discussion, make any necessary changes or refinements to the work.

## Checklist



Before moving on to Step 6, be sure the team has:

- Determined which causes are most urgent and will be most productive to address and recorded them on copies of [Worksheet 5-A \(Improvement objectives\)](#)
- Gathered information from other sources as listed on [Worksheet 5-B \(Resources needed for developing improvement objectives\)](#)
- Recorded the changes the school intends to make to student learning experiences on [Worksheet 5-A](#)
- Recorded goals, student learning objectives, causes, and improvement objectives in the [School Improvement Plan Template](#), the [PIM Access Database](#), or an alternate format



### Worksheet 5-A: Improvement objectives

**Guiding Question: Based on the causes of poor student achievement, what experiences do students need in order to improve their performance?**

Student group:

Content area:

Student learning objective (if applicable):

Cause (From Worksheet 4-C, D, or E)	Key experiences from brainstormed list	Improvement objective (Desired student learning experience)

**Notes on rationale:**

**Worksheet 5-B: Resources needed for developing improvement objectives**

**Guiding Question: What resources should you consult to better understand the causes you have identified?**

Cause	Information needed	Where to look	Who will gather the information?