

Coherence Guidebook

A planning tool for building a pathway to deeper learning and improved student outcomes







Introduction

We believe that great schools create the conditions for students to regularly engage in **Deeper Learning**. In these schools, students are known and valued, learning experiences are relevant, real-world, and interactive, and individualized supports enable students to excel at grade level or beyond. This approach builds on the research of effective instruction, with an emphasis on **culturally and linguistically sustaining practices**.

Deeper Learning

Deeper Learning is defined as grade-level work that is relevant, real-world, and interactive and leads to student demonstration of Mastery, Identity, and Creativity.

- ★ Mastery is evident when all students develop the knowledge and/or skills outlined in the standards and practices, with the ability to transfer that knowledge across situations.
- ★ Identity is evident when all students become more invested in the discipline by thinking of and seeing themselves as capable and active agents who do that kind of work. To support a shift in thinking from "I am learning about biology," to "I am a biologist," educators affirm students' complex identities, including cultural and racial heritage, and leverage their funds of knowledge, experiences, and interests.
- ★ Creativity is evident when all students shift from receiving knowledge of a discipline to acting or applying their learning to share ideas, solutions, and/or make something within the discipline.

Visit DESE's <u>Deeper Learning web page</u> for more information about Deeper Learning.

Culturally and Linguistically Sustaining Practices

Culturally responsive learning environments view culture and identity as assets and valuable resources, including students' race, ethnicity, or linguistic assets, among other characteristics. Classrooms across these schools regularly provide culturally and linguistically sustaining practices.

Culturally Sustaining Practices call for schools as places that should be "sustaining – rather than eradicating – the cultural ways of being of communities of color" through:

- Critical centering on dynamic community languages, valued practices, and knowledges
- * Student and community agency and input,
- ★ Content and instruction that acknowledges the histories of racial, ethnic, and linguistic communities,
- ★ Contending with internalized oppressions, and
- ★ Educators to be able to "curricularize" (or adapt curriculum to) those learning settings

Linguistically Sustaining Practices promote multilingualism as an asset, honor the linguistic resources students bring to the classroom, and rely on a research-based understanding of how students acquire language. Leveraging their understanding of students and the process of language acquisition, educators unpack the language expectations embedded in classroom tasks and design scaffolds and explicit language instruction that provide all students access to rigorous content.

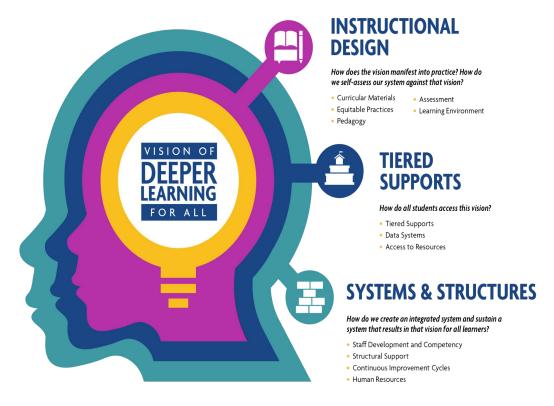
Visit DESE's <u>Culturally Responsive Teaching & Leading web page</u> for more information and works cited.



A Tool for Coherent Planning

Over the last several years, the Department has published and utilized several frameworks and resources (see <u>Appendix</u>) that capture elements of great schools and levers to create conditions that improve student outcomes. This planning tool pulls them together and builds off of them to illustrate a systems-level path toward achieving this vision, which requires school systems to engage in a coherent planning process, including:

- ★ Beginning with a shared instructional vision, grounded in deeper learning and culturally and linguistically sustaining practices;
- ★ Identifying a high-leverage instructional priority (or priorities) that will move teaching and learning closer to that vision;
- ★ Identifying tiered supports that will enhance or increase access to the instructional priority for all students; and
- ★ Finally, aligning specific systems and structures for staff development, resource allocation, and continuous improvement to support the instructional priority and related tiered supports.



The following sections in this planning guide invite you to review your current data, reflect on your practices, systems, and structures, and identify high-leverage priorities to drive improvement planning, all through an equity lens.

- I. Starting with a Review
- II. Conducting the Self-Assessment
- III. Prioritization and Planning

Once priorities and potential focus areas have been identified, school systems may wish to dive deeper into particular focus or content areas. These deeper dives can be accessed through the Appendix documents and in partnership with various Department support teams.



I. Starting With A Review

Guiding Question: How close are we to our vision based on current systems?

How close are we to our vision based on current systems?

We must examine our current systems to move closer to a vision of deeper learning for all students. The self-assessment covers many complex elements that you likely will not be able to easily or immediately evaluate.

As you preview the self-assessment, consider which data sources you will draw on to respond accurately and thoroughly to each indicator. Below is a recommended sequence and data types you should include in the self-assessment process. These data sources are meant to be viewed holistically to inform your understanding of strengths and areas for growth; no data point should be considered in isolation. In addition to gaining a system-wide understanding of strengths and areas for growth, you should use this process to identify particular discrepancies in outcomes, access, and experiences between student populations, classrooms, and/or schools. There will be myriad ways in which you can conduct the self-assessment. This guide offers you two options for using data to inform your self-assessment process. You can engage in a self-assessment planning sequence or host a retreat where the group uses readily accessible data during the self-assessment process.

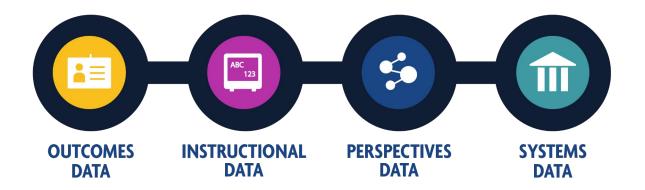
- ★ Sequenced Planning Option Here, a team meets before conducting the self-assessment to triangulate and analyze data. The team may be the district leadership team or a subset of the larger stakeholder group. Prior to the self-assessment, the team reviews the self-assessment and conducts the data and document collection and assessment. This can occur in a prolonged workshop setting or over multiple meetings. They then bring this information to the full planning team's self-assessment session(s).
- ★ Retreat Option In this option, the team meets in one lengthy session or a series of sequential meetings to gather and analyze data and documents and complete the self-assessment. In order for this to happen, it is recommended that the people who need to pull up data and documents are present and available to gather this information during the meeting(s).

Equity Pause

How are we explicitly centering the voices of students, families, and diverse stakeholders in our planning process? Use this <u>Data Equity Pause Protocol</u> to examine your data through an equity lens.



Regardless of the model, the following components of data review will be vital in helping you rate yourself on the self-assessment. It is important to note that while school and district processes may vary, it is crucial to leverage the perspectives of diverse stakeholders and consistently ask, "How do we know?" to anchor data on the student experience.



Look at Student Outcomes and Instructional Data

Looking at **student outcomes**, including accountability data, can provide a high-level view of progress toward your vision and where there may be gaps in opportunities for particular students (such as in specific grade levels, subject areas, schools, or student populations). These outcome data can help you identify more targeted **instructional data** for a closer look at student experience in the classroom, including examining curricular materials and observing instructional strategies. Together, these data sources can help point school systems toward areas worth exploring in more detail as potential focus areas for continuous improvement.

Hear from Students and Other Stakeholders

School systems should use the data analysis conducted with accountability and instructional data to speak directly to students and other stakeholders (including staff members and families) about their perspectives and experiences. Prioritizing the students identified as having the least access to the system's vision will provide a critical perspective on what areas should be focused on for continuous improvement while helping the district center equity in its improvement efforts.

Identify Additional Relevant Systems Information

Finally, system leaders can use the information unearthed in the data analysis and conversations with students and other stakeholders to identify particular systems and structures closely linked to the focus areas identified for improvement efforts. You may review additional system-specific documentation and/or data, such as policy handbooks, equity reviews, or staffing plans to better understand where these systems are or are not being leveraged effectively.



Sample Data Sets

Below are non-exhaustive examples of each data source discussed above.

Student Outcomes Data	Instructional Data	Perspectives Data	Systems/Structures Data
 ★ Measures of student achievement (e.g., screeners, formative benchmarks, or summative assessments) ★ Student performance measures (e.g., portfolios, student work, performances, capstones, etc.) ★ State accountability data (e.g., graduation rates, percentiles and progress toward targets, chronic absenteeism, etc.) ★ Standardized assessment data (e.g., MCAS for ELA, math, & science; ACCESS data for English language development, etc.) 	★ Observation data such as learning walks, instructional rounds, & evaluation data ★ Use of high-quality instructional materials (e.g., lesson plans, student tasks or assignments, and appropriate scaffolds) ★ Results of instructional materials against the Culturally Responsive Curriculum Scorecard ★ Monitoring Site Visit/Turnaround Site Visit (MSV/TSV) data	★ Stakeholder survey data (students, families, staff, community partners) ★ Local culture & climate survey data, or DESE's VOCAL data ★ Stakeholder focus group data (students, families, staff/faculty, community partners) ★ District reviews by DESE (specific sections that focus on stakeholder input)	 ★ Internal or external reviews such as an equity or a staffing review ★ Improvement plans (Strategic Plans, Capital Plans, Tech Plans, DIP, SIP) ★ List of initiatives and/or vendors and partners providing services (e.g., professional development and student programming) ★ Policy, practice, and procedural artifacts (e.g., policy manuals, schedules, handbooks)

II. Conducting the Self-Assessment

Guiding Question

To what extent are our current systems organized in alignment with deeper learning for all students?

To help you answer this guiding question, we recommend you engage in our systems-level self-assessment. The self-assessment is organized under four organizing components:



Vision

In this section you will examine your instructional vision and the degree to which it is grounded in deeper learning and equity and shared across the learning community.



Instructional Design

This section includes elements of the learning environment and the implementation of the vision in practice. This section will help you identify ways you might strengthen high-impact components of instructional design and move closer to instructional practices that embody deeper learning.



Tiered Supports

This part of the self-assessment explores components of tiered supports for students and effective data systems that are important for ensuring that all students are able to access deeper learning.



Systems & Structures

This final set of components explore the foundational aspects such as staff development and competency, our improvement cycles, and resource allocation, which can be leveraged to sustain a longer-term vision of deeper learning.

★★★ You can use this <u>worksheet</u> to conduct your self-assessment. ★★★



Focus Area

The learning community has a clear and articulated vision for instruction that is rooted in deeper learning and culturally and linguistically sustaining practices.

Guiding Question

What is our instructional vision?

Equity Pause

- ▶Does your vision lend itself to equitable and rigorous student outcomes for all learners?
- ▶How did your educators', students', and families' perspectives inform your vision?
- ▶How are strategies for equity at the individual-, institutional-, or systems-level built into the vision?

Shared Vision	Grounded in Equity	Student Experience
★ The learning community has a shared understanding of high-quality instruction, which promotes deeper learning for all students.	★ The instructional vision is grounded in equity, communicates high-expectations, and advances equitable outcomes for all learners.	★ The vision centers around the student experience and creates conditions for student engagement and agency in their own learning.



进 Instructional Design

Focus Area

The student learning experience is reflective of the school system's vision and is rooted in deeper learning. All students are known and valued, and are consistently engaged in culturally and linguistically sustaining instruction that is real-world, relevant, and interactive.

Guiding Question

How well does our vision show up in our daily practice and classroom experience?

Equity Pause

- ▶Whose perspective is being used to understand the effectiveness of our instructional design? Whose is missing?
- ▶What does student work show about the progress toward the instructional vision?
- ▶ Are there differences in how specific students or student populations experience our instructional design?

"Multilingual Learners" refers to all children and youth who are, or have been, consistently exposed to multiple languages.

As part of an asset-based belief system, this guidebook uses the term "Multilingual Learners" to describe all students who come into contact with and/or interact in languages in addition to English on a regular basis. They include students who are commonly referred to as "English Learners" (ELs), former English learners, dual language learners, newcomers, students with limited or interrupted formal schooling (SLIFE), long-term English learners, English learners with disabilities, gifted and talented English learners, heritage language learners, students with English as an additional language, and students who speak varieties of English or indigenous languages.

For policy purposes, the MA Department of Elementary and Secondary Education (DESE) maintains the term "English Learner." However, in an effort to encourage school communities to use terminology that is asset-based and inclusive, this guidebook uses the term "Multilingual Learners", beginning with the indicators listed on the next page.

	Learning Environment	(Curricular Materials		Equitable Practices		Pedagogy		Assessment			
3	Safe & Supportive: The learning environment is joyful, healthy, safe, and supportive of students' physical and mental health and wellness.	*	Instructional Materials: Materials are bias-free, nave empirical evidence of efficacy (high-quality nstructional materials/HQIM), students receive challenging, grade-appropriate instruction and have equitable access to individualized support and effective	High-quality Instructional Materials: Materials are bias-free, have empirical evidence of efficacy (high-quality instructional materials/HQIM),	*	Practices: The learning community implements effective instructional practices, rooted in deeper learning and culturally and	*	Data-Informed Practice: Standards- based and universally designed formative and summative assessments are used to monitor student				
1	Belonging: Students experience a learning environment that is		engaging content, and are inclusive in design.	*	instructional practices. ESL: All Multilingual Learners have access to appropriate ESL services	*	linguistically sustaining practices. Implementation: The organization has		progress toward learning goals and to inform effective instructional support.			
	welcoming and affirming, where all students are known and valued.	*	Coherence: Materials used across all three tiers exhibit a coherent		as part of their Tier 1 instruction.		identified measures and resources (e.g.,	*	Data-Based Decisions: There is a process for			
*	Partnership: There are systems to develop	: : :	sequence of target skills and knowledge that advances deeper learning (i.e., vertically,	*	ML Support: Multilingual Learners, at all proficiency levels, are provided equitable		observation tools or an instructional guide) to ensure organization- wide fidelity.		collecting and analyzing student work throughout units to monitor student			
	authentic partnerships with students and families that elevate their voices						and horizontally aligned)		access to grade-level curriculum and have opportunities to develop	*	High Expectations: There are high expectations for all	
	and leadership in decision- making.	*	Vision Alignment: The learning community has a system for reviewing		and practice discipline- specific language.		students across all classrooms, including	*	Engagement: Each student's strengths,			
			curricular materials and adjusting as needed to align to the instructional vision.	*	SWD/504 Support: Instructional practices outlined in the 504 or IEP and used with students with disabilities must be research-based, provide equitable access Tier 1 instruction, and implemented with fidelity.		multilingual learners, students with disabilities, and students with neurodiversity such that students are engaging with grade-level work (or beyond) that advances deeper learning.		progress, and areas for growth are shared with students and families such that students and families know and can track their progress.			



Tiered Supports

Focus Area

The organization uses an MTSS model to provide a tiered and fluid continuum of evidence-based academic and social-emotional/behavioral supports for all students at universal (Tier 1), targeted (Tier 2), and intensive (Tier 3) levels.

Guiding Question

How well do we ensure that all students have equitable access to our instructional vision?

Equity Pause

- ▶What progress is being made toward your vision, disaggregated by specific student groups?
- ▶ Are certain student populations overrepresented in particular tiers of support and/or in the referral process? What potential biases might be contributing to overrepresentation?
- ▶How do adults examine their own biases and their effects in relation to the vision? What biases are coming up as part of the work?

Tiered System	ns of Support		Data-Driven		Access to Resources
 ★ Domains: There is a developing a comp supports for all lear domains (academic and behavioral). ★ Tiered Support: The conditions and systuniversal (Tier 1), taintensive (Tier 3) sum the size (a systemic approach to brehensive set of tiered riners across all three consistency and apport to students. Learners receive rices, access to Tier 1 access a tiered as needed. Igned and implemented wDs can access a tiered support as east restrictive dent Supports: Is and students are attended support as east regularly ogress. Is receive the eed to advocate for	*	Data Systems: All schools have a clear system and process of collecting and distributing universal screening, diagnostic, and progress monitoring to inform placement and progress within their tiered system of support. Assessment Plans: All schools have an assessment plan that defines the purpose, type, and timing of all schoolwide and district-wide assessments, inclusive of universal screeners, diagnostic assessments, language development, and progress monitoring tools (across all three domains). The map is reviewed regularly to ensure that it is accessible to all as well as culturally and linguistically appropriate. Data Driven Culture: Leaders and educators create/embrace a culture that centers the use of triangulated data to assess and address current systems that create barriers for students. Student Needs: Administrators, teachers, students, and families/caregivers engage in strategic problem-solving processes that identify student needs and determine progress monitoring protocols for short-	* * * *	Reviews: A regular review of student needs is conducted at least annually to ensure that student needs drive staffing and service structures, as opposed to retrofitting student needs into existing models or assessing positions and/or roles that no longer meet the needs of current students, or models that may be contributing to inequity. Tiered Staffing: The staffing selection, models and positions are designed to support implementation of MTSS based on students' needs. Consideration is given to staff titles and duties to foster a positive approach to meeting the needs of all students. Staff are (re)allocated based on student need annually and during the year. Tiered Scheduling: The schedule articulates when tiered supports will occur, ensures that intervention services are supplemental and not supplanting core instruction, priorities direct student supports in staff schedules, and provides time to administer and review data to identify and monitor students. Community Partnerships: Community partners are actively engaged to better support students and families/caregivers and to connect them to social services related to health, social, recreational, and supplemental educational services.
rights to request a s	en and are informed of their quest a special education at any time during the tiered ocess.	and long-term goals. This includes students with diverse needs such as those with IEPs and 504 plans, as well as Multilingual Learners.	*	Technology: Educational and assistive technology is available for all students and used in alignment with the instructional vision and to increase access to appropriate tiered supports.	

Systems & Structures

Focus Area

The organization utilizes its systems and structures to prioritize and allocate their people, time, technology, funding, etc. in service of the instructional vision. This results in optimizing tiered systems needed to support all students.

Guiding Question

How well do our systems and structures support our instructional vision?

Equity Pause

- ▶ How does the culture support personal and professional learning in relation to the instructional vision?
- ▶How do adults learn in your schools? How does this mirror your vision (or not)?
- ▶To what extent does the learning community reflect on and confront inherent biases in their collaboration and processes? What is the outcome of that reflection?
- ► How do we honor all voices at the decision making and implementation stages of our programming? For example, what do we do to ensure representative stakeholders and invite multiple voices and perspectives into our processes?
- ▶To what extent do teams have the autonomy and information to make the decisions they are tasked with?

Staff Development and Competency	Structural Support
Professional Learning Plan: The organization has a sustainable professional learning plan that offers coherent high-quality, universally designed professional development is informed by and results in movement toward the instructional vision.	Alignment to Vision: Resources are strategically aligned for impact and informed by data and allocations are vetted with a lens toward access and equity and the alignment between resources and the instructional vision is well articulated.
★ High-Quality Professional Learning: Educators engage in data-based and relevant ongoing, job-embedded professional learning opportunities including frequent observations and feedback that advance skillful use of high-quality curricular materials and associated educational technology. Professional learning results in the use of effective instructional practices that advance deeper learning and includes tiered coaching models.	 ★ Fiscal Support: The budget provides appropriate levels of funding for high quality instructional and intervention materials and assessments, key positions, professional development, etc. ★ Structural Review: Policies, practices, and procedures are analyzed with an equity lens, such as a review for disproportionality for students of color or accessing the language accessibility of the assessment for MLs. ★ Technology: There is a clear and consistent process for selecting and
★ Collaborative Planning: There is time in the schedule for educators (including interventionists, ESL instructors, and special educators) with designated opportunities to collaborate, analyze data and student work, to assess the effectiveness of instruction, plan, and engage in learning experiences that deepen their understanding and implementation of effective instructional practices and provide access to grade- appropriate content for all students.	evaluating technology products that are aligned to the instructional vision and responsive to student and staff needs.
★ Observation and Feedback: All schools and/or teams have routines and systems for frequent observation and feedback that focus on clearly defined and communicated expectations for effective instructional practices in order to advance deeper learning.	
★ Evaluation: There are strategic, un-biased, and transparent systems for evaluation, using student feedback, observation data, and review of artifacts along to make informed decisions about opportunities for educator support and leadership development.	

Continuous Improvement Cycles

- Leadership Commitment: There is an active leadership team that takes on the responsibility of ensuring that systems meet the needs of all learners. The team has the authority to make resource, scheduling, programmatic, and staffing decisions and has representation from a range of leaders (e.g., academics, student support, special education, and Multilingual Learners).
- Continuous Improvement: The organization engages in ongoing and inclusive long-term (multi-year and annual) and short-term (quarterly and monthly) goal setting and monitoring towards realizing the instructional vision and ensuring each student is making progress, which results in adjustments to the school's structures, programs, and resources (e.g., time, staff, schedules) throughout the year.
- Representation: Voices from all students, families, and communities are used to drive improvement efforts and obtain perceptual data on the progress of the plan. Representation is assessed to ensure participation and engagement represent the community at large, with a specific lens to remove barriers for participation (e.g., transportation or language barriers).
- Equity Focused: Improvement efforts are grounded in concepts of equity and identify clear goals to close the opportunity gap for all students (including MLs, SWDs, newcomers, SLIFE, MLSWDs, etc.).
- ★ Multi-Year Planning: A multi-year district strategy process is established and results in a multi-year plan rooted in implementation science. The district plan informs annual district action plans, school improvement plans and educator goals. Annual action plans include the use of benchmarks to access progress toward the improvement goals.
- Midcourse Corrections & Continuous Improvement: Based on the data collected through fidelity measures and feedback loops, decisions are made about how to enhance the effectiveness of the work.

Distributive Leadership: The organization has instructional leadership teams or equivalent structures to collaboratively develop and reflect on the effectiveness of professional development, planning and implementation efforts. Across the organization, team and collaboration structures create shared responsibility and ownership and have an impact on school improvement.

Human Resources

- HIring: Hiring processes and procedures are bias-free and ensure that candidates have the relevant expertise to meet students' needs and have a mindset and belief that all students can learn at high levels. The organization systematically reviews staff hiring processes and policies to ensure that they are non-discriminatory, inclusive, and focused on meeting the needs of all learners
- Retention: Hiring and retention policies and procedures include strategies to recruit, mentor, train, and support a diverse educator and administrator workforce that is well-prepared to teach culturally and linguistically-diverse students.

III. Prioritization and Planning

Equity Pause

- ▶Do our plans clearly prioritize the students that are least well-served by our current system?
- ▶If you haven't done so already, complete this <u>Data Equity Pause Protocol</u> to deeply examine these questions and triangulate your data and self-assessment results to inform your planning.

Systemic planning is a critical component of sustainable improvement efforts. Once you have engaged in the data review and self-assessment, you can use the results to inform your planning and continuous improvement efforts. You should not attempt to address every area but instead, start by identifying high-leverage priorities.

Once you have completed the data review, self-assessment, and an equity pause, begin the coherent planning process by identifying high-priority focus areas. You can use this template to support this prioritization process.



Vision

What is your instructional vision?

Immediate Next Step

Based on your understanding of equity and opportunity gaps in your system, what (if any) immediate next step could you take to ensure your vision promotes deeper learning for all students? You can use this resource to craft an instructional vision.

Longer-Term Next Steps

What (if any) longer-term next steps will you need to take to ensure your instructional vision promotes deeper learning for all students?





Instructional Design

What are your top 3 growth areas from the self-assessment? Based on your review of data and equity pause, what might be some instructional priority areas to consider?

Immediate Next Step

Looking at your growth areas above, if you could be truly excellent at one thing (or a few) that would have the greatest impact on teaching and learning in service of your vision, what would it be?

Longer-Term Next Steps

If multiple priorities emerge, which item should come first/ second/ third? What would need to be incorporated into a multi-year plan?





Tiered Supports

What are your top 3 growth areas from the self-assessment?

Immediate Next Step

Do you need to enhance prioritized aspects of your Tiered Supports to achieve your instructional priority?

Longer-Term Next Steps

If multiple priorities emerge, which item should come first/ second/ third? What would need to be incorporated into a multi-year plan?





Systems & Structures

What are your top 3 growth areas from the self-assessment?

Immediate Next Step

Which systems and structures will best enable the priorities in the previous sections? Prioritize a few of these systems to focus on.

Longer-Term Next Steps

If multiple priorities emerge, which item should come first/second/third? What would need to be incorporated into a multi-year plan?

Plan

For each priority area identified, you may wish to conduct additional analyses and stakeholder engagement before mapping out specific timelines and ownership. Some specific next steps may include:

- Review and/or revise your instructional priority, using an equity lens (see <u>sample protocol</u>).
- ★ Perform a root cause analysis for the identified priorities.
- ★ Form a diverse coalition to steward the identified instructional priority (see LT framework).
- ★ Map out specific action steps across stakeholder groups, such as central office, principals, teachers, other staff members, students, families, etc. (see sample protocol).
- ★ Solicit further stakeholder input/feedback on strategy and action steps.
- ★ Determine supports that will help you achieve priorities (e.g. through DESE's <u>Support Catalog</u>).

Progress Monitor

To support the implementation of your plan, your team will want to meet periodically to review progress against your priority areas and action plan, including feedback loops, fidelity measures, and/or scheduled time to review progress. Some specific next steps may include:

- Write goals & metrics aligned with instructional priority and based on relevant district data (see sample template and example).
- ★ Calendar 90-day continuous improvement data reviews to assess progress and plan how to respond.
- ★ Incorporate goals, metrics, and progress monitoring strategies into any formal or informal planning processes (e.g. Sustainable Improvement Planning).
- Build and/or identify data tools and systems to efficiently monitor progress.

You can find resources to support planning efforts in our Appendix: Action Steps and Resources.