**Creating the Action Plan**

Creating an Action Plan That Supports Implementation, Monitoring, and Reporting

**What is an Action Plan?** An action plan is a detailed implementation plan for the strategic initiatives that a school or district has prioritized for implementation in the current year. Action plan components include implementation benchmarks and the resources—people, time, materials, and funds—needed to support the action plan’s successful implementation. The Massachusetts Planning and Implementation Framework defines two types of implementation benchmarks: process benchmarks, which define who will do what and when, and early evidence of change benchmarks, which define changes you should begin to see if the plan is having its desired impact during implementation.

**Why This Step is Important:** Once the multi-year plan is in place, creating an action plan is a natural next step in the planning process. At this stage, the school or district reviews the work identified in the multi-year plan and identifies the work to be conducted in the current year. The action plan team then conducts a deeper level of implementation planning for those strategic initiatives, which results in both a more comprehensive understanding of the work to be done and a plan that the school or district can use to guide, monitor, and report on its work over the course of the year. Many schools and districts find it particularly useful to conduct action planning prior to the start of a new school year.

**Preparing to Action Plan:** To prepare for action planning, schools or districts need to select and/or formulate the strategic initiatives to action plan and create an action plan team for each of these initiatives. These action plan teams will “own” the action plan for their assigned initiative during both development and implementation. The *Planning for Success* guide, “Identifying Strategic Initiatives and Participants for Action Planning,” is a resource that can assist schools and districts in this work.

The “Identifying Strategic Initiatives and Participants for Action Planning” resource also provides information about how to conduct a *Planning for Success* Plan Assessment prior to the step of identifying strategic initiatives for action planning. Conducting a plan assessment may be especially useful for schools or districts that are creating an action plan based on a multi-year plan that has been in effect for one or more years, or a plan that was created through a process other than PfS. In such cases, the additional review and further formulation of school or district strategic initiatives may be necessary and beneficial to action planning.

**Getting Started with the Action Plan Team:** For many schools and districts, the creation and use of an annual action plan marks a change in practice. The action planning process itself—from development through implementation—provides an opportunity for schools and districts to structure work in new ways, sharing leadership with individuals across the community serving in a range of roles. As a result, action planning has the potential to positively affect both culture and practice.

To maximize this opportunity and potential, it is helpful for schools or districts to begin work with the action plan team by conducting a SWOT Analysis prior to creating the action plan. A SWOT Analysis, as described in the *Planning for Success* guide, “Analyzing District Planning Practices and Culture,” will surface some of the issues that might arise during action planning and can be very useful in helping schools or districts plan the process in order to respond to these issues.

**The Action Planning Process:** Once strategic initiatives and action plan team members have been identified and the role and norms of the action plan team have been established, action planning is ready to begin. The process below describes how to set the stage for, and conduct, action planning.

1. *Introduce the action plan model and benchmarks (Slides 1-8):* Set the stage for action planning by presenting the *Planning for Success* action planning process and action plan components. Examine the two types of implementation benchmarks—process and early evidence of change. Introduce the Plan/Do/Study/Act (PDSA) continuous improvement cycle and illustrate the ways in which process benchmarks support the “Do” portion of the cycle and early evidence of change benchmarks support the “Study” portion.

Allow the action plan teams time to explore and brainstorm early evidence of change benchmarks. For example, select two or three strategic initiatives from the school or district plan, from one of the sample plans posted to the *Planning for Success* website, or from the presentation slide text below. Organize into small groups to draft early evidence of change examples for assigned initiatives. Reconvene as a whole group and review small group examples. Highlight the range of early evidence benchmarks that can be created for one strategic initiative and discuss the advantages and disadvantages of these draft early evidence benchmarks.

The time required for these activities is approximately 45 minutes to 1 hour.

1. *Conduct the action planning workshop (Slide 9):* Organize by strategic initiative action plan teams and begin the action planning workshop. Share the *Planning for Success* Action Plan Template below and ask each action plan team to use it to document their action plan. It is most helpful if the recorder of each action plan team works directly in this template online, creating an action plan draft during the workshop session that may be distributed afterward. Allow approximately 1 to 1.5 hours for the initial action planning workshop.

At the end of this initial action planning period, the team will still be in the process of creating the action plan. However, it is helpful to pause at this point and use the *Planning for Success* Action Plan Review Protocol to conduct a modified, initial review of the developing action plan. With this protocol, action plan teams provide feedback to one another about their initial thinking and development of the action plan.

Many action plan teams observe that such feedback in the early stages of plan development is very helpful. Teams often comment that they are more receptive to colleagues’ questions, suggestions, and perspectives when these suggestions are offered before action plan teams have more fully developed their plans and become “wedded” to their own work. This review protocol is provided in the *Planning for Success* guide, “Reviewing and Revising the Draft Action Plan.”

**Time Required**: Action plan creation is an iterative process; the plan will benefit from feedback gathered with the PfS Action Plan Review Protocol, which may be conducted multiple times. The initial launch and drafting of action plans described by the two-step process above requires approximately 2-3 hours to complete, prior to initial action plan review.

**Note to Facilitators:** As noted earlier, action planning offers the opportunity to positively impact both practice and culture. It is important, therefore, to set norms with the action plan team as described in the *Planning for Success* resource “Getting Started with the Action Planning Team.” It is also helpful for the superintendent or principal to set expectations for this work at the start, encouraging open and honest dialogue.

As facilitator, it is essential that you message from the start of the process that action planning is the opportunity for teams to more fully “flesh out” and develop the strategic initiatives chosen for the multi-year plan. Action planning is the point in the *Planning for Success* process where “the rubber meets the road” for these strategic initiatives. The purpose of action planning is to conduct this deeper level of planning required for effective implementation—a level of planning that was not designed to be part of the multi-year planning process.

As action plan teams begin their work, encourage them to discuss the strategic initiatives and identify any terms that should be defined to create a clear and shared understanding of each initiative. For example, the community’s understanding of terms such as “equity” or “inclusive” might benefit from written definitions. In addition, as the action plan develops, encourage action plan teams to create a written description of their strategic initiative that can be more easily shared with the community. The PfS Action Plan Template includes sections where action plan teams can record this information as part of their action plan.

**Text for Facilitator Presentation Slides:** Some suggested text for presentation slides for creating an action plan is included below.

**Slide 1: Action Plan Elements**

* Implementation benchmarks
  + Process benchmarks: what, when, who
  + Early evidence of change benchmarks: measuring impact during implementation
* Resources
  + People, time, materials, funds

**Slide 2: Implementation Benchmarks**

* Process
  + What will be done, when, and by whom
  + *Are we on track to accomplish what we want to accomplish? Is the work getting done?*
* Early evidence of change
  + Changes in practice, attitude, or behavior you should begin to see if the initiative is having its desired impact
  + *Does our selected strategy appear to be having the desired impact?*

**Slide 3: Examples**

* Process benchmark
  + All grade 3 teachers will complete reading program professional development by October 15, 2020.
* Early evidence of change benchmark
  + 75% of all teacher observations conducted by principals at each school will contain evidence of reading strategy implementation by February 3, 2021.

**Slide 4:**

* How do these action plan benchmarks support continuous improvement?

**Slide 5: Plan/Do/Study/Act (PDSA)**

“a vehicle for constant, continual improvement and innovation…”

**circle of continual improvment: plan, do, study, act**

Roehm, H. A., & Castellano, J. F. (1997). The Deming view of a business. *Quality Progress, 30*(2), 39-45.

**Slide 6: PDSA Cycle**

**circle of continual improvment: plan, do, study, act**

Moen, R. D., & Norman, C. L. (2010). Circling back. *Quality Progress*, 43(11), p.27.

**Slide 7: Drafting Early Evidence of Change Benchmarks**

At your tables, create an early evidence benchmark for one of these initiatives:

1. Implement a PK-12 social and emotional learning framework and vision
2. Engage families as partners, with differentiated opportunities for engagement and voice

* *What specific and measurable changes in practice, attitude, or behavior should you begin to see if this initiative is having its desired impact?*

**Slide 8: Group Presentations**

* What benchmark did your group develop?
* Why does the group believe this is an effective measure for this initiative?

**Slide 9: Action Planning Workshop**

* Organize into strategic initiative action plan teams that will design and “own” the initiative’s action plan
* Identify a facilitator and recorder
* Complete an action plan template for each of the strategic initiatives to be implemented
* What are the key actions/steps we need to take to implement this initiative?
  + Process benchmarks: who is going to ensure these actions are taken? When?
* How will we know if this initiative is having its desired impact?
  + Early evidence of change benchmark: changes practice, attitude, behavior

**[School or District Name] Action Plan [Timeframe]**

*Setting Benchmarks to Monitor Progress and Impact During Implementation*

| **Strategic Objective** |  |
| --- | --- |
| **Strategic Initiative** |  |

**Describing Implementation**

*Describe how the initiative will be implemented, for example, citing programs by grade span, etc.*

|  |
| --- |

**Defining Key Terms**

*Define terms relevant for this initiative such as “equity” or “inclusion”*

| **Term** | **Definition** |
| --- | --- |
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**Monitoring Progress**

*Process Benchmarks:**What will be done, when, and by whom*

| **Process Benchmark** | **Person Responsible** | **Date** | **Status** |
| --- | --- | --- | --- |
| *Example: Identify common district-wide reading strategies* | *M. Edwards* | *3/4/19* | *Met* |
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**Measuring Impact**

*Early Evidence of Change: Changes in practice, attitude, or behavior you should begin to see if the initiative is having its desired impact*

| **Early Evidence of Change Benchmark** | **Person Responsible** | **Date** | **Status** |
| --- | --- | --- | --- |
| *Example: 75% of all teacher observations conducted in each school cite evidence of reading strategy implementation* | *S. Harris* | *2/1/20* |  |
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**Identifying Resources Supporting Implementation**

*List the people, time, materials and funds needed to implement this initiative*

| **Resource list (people, time, materials, money)** | **New/expanded use of existing resource** | **Reallocation/**  **Reassignment of Resource** | **New resources** | **Notes** |
| --- | --- | --- | --- | --- |
| *Example: Out of district pd provider for new reading strategies* |  |  | *District pd budget* |  |
| *Example: District pd for training teachers on new strategies* |  | *Time on existing PD calendar* |  |  |
| *Example: Coaching and modeling during PLCs for grade-level implementation of reading strategies* | *District ELA coaches will add strategies to coaching agenda* |  |  |  |
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