**Identifying Strategic Initiatives and Participants for Action Planning**

Ensuring Readiness for Action Planning with Necessary Conditions in Place

**Why This Step is Important:** In order to be ready for action planning, schools or districts must identify two items:

* The strategic initiatives that will be implemented in the coming year, for which action plans will be created
* The strategic group of individuals most closely linked to each of these strategic initiatives, who will compose the action plan team

The work required to identify strategic initiatives for action planning will vary for schools and districts depending on the state of the multi-year plan and the current context. If the school or district created its multi-year plan using *Planning for Success*, the work of identifying strategic initiatives will likely be straightforward. As a result of the PfS planning process, strategic initiatives should be clearly formulated, actionable, and ready to action plan once the school or district has prioritized initiatives for implementation.

If a school or district has created its multi-year plan through another planning process or is action planning strategic initiatives that are being newly formed, the work required to frame strategic initiatives for action planning may be more complex. In such situations, schools and districts often realize that there is more work to be done on their existing plan and its strategic initiatives before action planning can begin. For example, leaders may realize that their existing plan is out of date and not in use within the school or district. Leaders may realize that their existing plan’s strategic initiatives are too broad and not defined clearly enough to be actionable. Or leaders may realize that the existing plan is not clearly understood and supported, and that buy-in needs to be established before effective action planning can begin.

This resource provides guidance for identifying both the strategic initiatives for action planning and the team of individuals best suited to plan their implementation. It also includes an activity for assessing and improving an existing multi-year plan in situations such as those described above, when more work in formulating the strategic initiatives to action plan would be helpful.

**Prioritizing Strategic Initiatives for the Annual Action Plan:** When identifying strategic initiatives to action plan, leaders should consider issues of urgency, scope of work, the number of initiatives to implement at once, resource allocation, and school or district capacity. In addition, for most schools or districts, the continuous improvement process introduced by action planning marks a significant change in practice that requires new learning for all involved. Leaders may want to weigh the importance of having a successful experience when determining how ambitious to be with the number of initiatives to action plan in one year, particularly the first. Leaders may also want to consider action planning some initiatives over multiple years, should they prefer to implement a larger number of initiatives simultaneously.

When selecting strategic initiatives for implementation, leaders may also want to consider inviting the community to participate in this prioritization process, particularly if the school or district recently completed an inclusive PfS multi-year planning process. For example, leaders might ask community members to “vote” for the 2 or 3 strategic initiatives in the multi-year plan that they consider most important for immediate implementation, and tally and share these results. A simple, inclusive activity such as this one can be very useful in the action planning process and to creating community ownership and advocacy if the school or district is committed to using this feedback as part of the prioritization process.

**Identifying Action Plan Team Members:** Once the school or district has identified strategic initiatives to action plan, leaders will want to identify an action plan team that is responsible for planning each initiative. In determining team membership, leaders will want to consider individuals’ roles and responsibilities from multiple perspectives and in relation to various stakeholder groups. Since action plan teams will create the action plan and continue working together to oversee and monitor its implementation, it is important to create teams with the range of expertise necessary to effectively support each initiative. In addition, leaders may want to consider who will act as the project leader of each action plan team and assume primary responsibility for action plan updates and communication.

**The *Planning for Success* Plan Assessment Activity:** As noted above, the PfS Plan Assessment can be a helpful activity for a school or district as it assesses action plan readiness. This activity is a time-efficient way for leadership teams to reflect on the work the school or district has been engaged in and the extent to which this work has been guided by the existing plan. Analyzing the gaps between this lived experience and the existing plan provides teams with useful feedback about their use of the plan as well as the opportunity to make recommendations for strengthening the plan and its ability to support continuous improvement.

To conduct the plan assessment activity:

1. Organize the team into small groups of 4 to 6 participants each. If possible, ensure that each group includes members of different stakeholder groups.
2. Introduce the plan assessment activity and review its purpose, the assessment process, and the assessment worksheet.
3. Ask each small group to identify a facilitator and a recorder and to complete the plan assessment protocol.
4. Reconvene as a whole group. Ask the facilitators of all small groups to share their group’s work.
5. Collect the assessment worksheet from the recorders of all small groups. Type assessment results and recommendations for future use.

**Time Required**: This activity can be conducted in 50 minutes to 1.5 hours, depending on available time. Allow participants at least 40 minutes to complete the assessment. Whole group share and discussion of common themes may range from 10-30 minutes.

**Text for Facilitator Presentation Slide:** Some suggested text for the presentation slides for the plan assessment activity is included below.

**Slide 1: Assessing the Current Plan**

* The Work: Lived experience
* The Plan: Stated objectives

**Slide 2**

* To what extent is the existing plan guiding the work of the [school or district] and supporting improvement?

**Slide 3: Strategic Objectives and Strategic Initiatives**

* Strategic objectives
	+ The coherent group of overarching goals that will achieve the future vision (the “what” and the “why”)
	+ Example: *Employ teaching practices that are highly engaging, emphasize innovation, and offer multiple paths to student success*
* Strategic initiatives
	+ The projects and programs that will help achieve each one of the objectives (the “how”)
	+ Example: *Provide professional development PK-12 for innovative, interdisciplinary, and engaging pedagogy*

**Slide 4: PfS Plan Assessment, Part 1**

* Organize into small mixed groups
* Identify a facilitator and a recorder
* Complete Part 1 of the PfS Plan Assessment, reflecting on the [school’s or district’s] work (*do not refer to the existing plan*)
	1. What are the objectives, or overarching goals, currently in effect for your district or school?
	2. What strategic initiatives did your district or school work on last year?

 **Slide 5: PfS Plan Assessment, Part 2**

* Complete Part 2 of the PfS Plan Assessment, referring to the existing plan
	1. What similarities/differences do you see between the strategic objectives and initiatives you described as lived experience and those stated in the multi-year plan?

**Slide 6: PfS Plan Assessment, Part 3**

* Complete Part 3 of the PfS Plan Assessment
	1. What do the similarities/differences between lived experience and plan tell you about the current state of the existing plan?
	2. What steps do you recommend, if any, for strengthening the existing plan and its ability to support continuous improvement?

***Planning for Success* Plan Assessment Worksheet**

**Instructions:** *Leadership teams can use this tool to evaluate an existing multi-year district or school plan. It is particularly useful for teams considering a plan revision and/or preparing for action planning. This assessment highlights the extent to which an existing plan is guiding work and supporting improvement.*

| **Step 1: What are the objectives, or overarching goals, currently in effect for your district or school?** Without referring to the plan, identify objectives evidenced by current work. These objectives may or may not be those stated in the plan. List up to 5.*Example: Strengthen social/emotional learning*  |
| --- |
| **Objective 1** | **Objective 2** | **Objective 3** | **Objective 4** | **Objective 5** |
|  |  |  |  |  |
| **Step 2: What strategic initiatives did your district or school work on last year?** List the projects or programs that were underway last year. List initiatives by the objective they are associated with or under “Other.”*Example: Implement advisory grades 6-12*  |
| **Initiatives for Objective 1** | **Initiatives for Objective 2** | **Initiatives for Objective 3** | **Initiatives for Objective 4** | **Initiatives for Objective 5** |
|  |  |  |  |  |

|  |  |  |  |  |
| --- | --- | --- | --- | --- |
| **Other:** |

**PART 2: Comparing Work/Lived Experience with the Plan**

*After completing Part 1, review the existing multi-year plan and respond to the following question.*

1. **What similarities/differences do you see between the strategic objectives and initiatives you described as lived experience and those stated in the multi-year plan?**

**PART 3: Analyzing Gaps Between Lived Experience and the Plan**

*After completing Parts 1 & 2, consider and respond to the following questions.*

1. **What do the similarities/differences between lived experience and the plan tell you about the current state of the existing plan?**
2. **What steps do you recommend, if any, for strengthening the existing plan and its ability to support continuous improvement?**