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Exploring Policies and  
Practices to Build Leadership  
for Rigorous Instruction

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The Reform Support Network, sponsored by the U.S. Department of Education, supports the Race to the Top grantees as they implement reforms in education policy and practice, learn from each other, and build their capacity to sustain these reforms, while sharing these promising practices and lessons learned with other States attempting to implement similarly bold education reform initiatives.

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# Exploring Policies and Practices to Build Leadership for Rigorous Instruction

## About These Tools

Committed to ensuring their students achieve newly adopted College and Career Ready Standards (CCRS) and to measuring educators' effectiveness through new, complex evaluation systems, 17 Race to the Top grantees gathered in October 2012 as a "community of practice" to explore how these education reforms impact instructional leadership by principals and others; in the same way they raise expectations for students and teachers, the reforms raise the bar for leaders' interactions with teachers and demand a new degree of focus on instruction. The states were assisted in their work by the Reform Support Network (RSN).

These tools were created to help teams from each state to form a shared understanding of what instructional leaders today need to know and be able to do, to see and use powerful levers in policy and practice to lift the capacity of instructional leaders, and to find ways for the State, school districts and other partners to coordinate, collaborate and act independently based on their unique roles to build instructional leadership.

## How to Use These Tools

The tools can be useful to any group interested in boosting the capacity of instructional leaders. They were developed to be used in progression, but can be used as needed based on a group's prior knowledge and discussion of the topics explored. Other content on the RSN's web pages also may be helpful to those seeking to build leadership for rigorous instruction.

Each tool lists a suggested time for undertaking the work based only on the time taken by State teams at the October 2012 convening. This time is only a suggestion and should be viewed as a floor for probing a topic, not a ceiling.

Each tool also lists materials a group may want to have on hand to support its work.

## Describing Instructional Leadership

If one thinks of the instructional leader as the principal or administrators at a school, that is a highly limited resource. Understood this way, the temptation is to think of a heroic leader that in rare cases exists, but is impossible to replicate at scale. The RSN describes instructional leadership as the work of setting direction; motivating and supporting staff towards goals; assessing progress; and driving continuous, collaborative organizational improvement that results in strong classroom practice and student achievement. Instructional leaders begins with principal and assistant principals but also include teacher leaders, coaches and central office staff who supervise and support school leaders and teachers.

## Thinking About What It Takes

The educational landscape is shifting in marked ways. CCRS are higher and more precise than many State standards that preceded them. More robust and rigorous evaluation frameworks raise the bar for teaching students, leading schools, and assessing and developing educators. School turnaround models demand swift and effective transformation of historically challenged schools. To meet these expectations, instructional leaders must focus on the skills and behaviors that have proven to be effective and that support these reforms. The perspectives, actions and communication needed to be effective often are referred to as *competencies*.

This tool can help you think about the competencies needed by instructional leaders and determine a State or school district's priorities in ensuring leaders demonstrate those competencies. This work should take about 45 minutes and can be completed by an individual or by a group. Using the tool, you should be able to:

- Articulate the competencies needed by instructional leaders to implement the current set of reforms in their schools.
- Identify gaps in a State or district leadership competency model and prioritize competencies that are needed to implement new reforms.
- Develop ideas for addressing gaps and increasing focus on prioritized competencies.

If one thinks of the instructional leader as the principal or administrators at a school, that is a highly limited resource. Understood this way, the temptation is to think of a heroic leader that in rare cases exists, but is impossible to replicate at scale. The RRSN describes instructional leadership as the work of setting direction; motivating and supporting staff towards goals; assessing progress; and driving continuous,

## Some Simple Ground Rules for Effective Discussions

As a starting point, a group using these tools should begin and end its meetings on time. Group members should pledge to give their undivided attention to the discussion and make good on the pledge by turning off smart phones and PDAs.

During the discussions:

- Everyone participates and contributes ideas openly—go big and bold.
- Build off the ideas of others.
- Silence equals agreement.
- Don't interrupt and avoid speeches and sidebar discussions.
- Focus on the priorities, not the personalities.
- Conflict is natural in healthy groups and is to be managed, but not avoided.

The Reform Support Network (RSN) offers collective and individualized technical assistance (TA) and resources to grantees of the Race to the Top education reform initiative sponsored by the U.S. Department of Education. The RSN's purpose is to support the Race to the Top grantees as they implement reforms in education policy and practice, learn from each other, and build their capacity to sustain these reforms. The RSN is also setting the groundwork for distributing the learning from the Race to the Top initiative to all states, by sharing promising practices and lessons learned with other states attempting to implement similarly bold education reform initiatives.

collaborative organizational improvement that results in strong classroom practice and student achievement. Instructional leaders can be principals, assistant principals, teacher leaders, coaches and central office staff who supervise and support school leaders and teachers.

*Note: You should have a copy of a State or school district leadership competency model for this exercise. If necessary, you can do this work using an example competency model available at the RSN's instructional leadership web pages.*

1. The Race to the Top initiative asks States and school districts to focus school improvement efforts on three critical areas of reform, which appear here at the top of each column. To start this work, make a list of school leadership skills and behaviors that are critical for implementing each reform successfully. (15 minutes)

Align curriculum, instruction and assessment to College and Career Ready Standards	Evaluate and develop teacher effectiveness	Turn around struggling schools
	<p><b>Examples for teacher effectiveness column:</b></p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• Develops shared understanding among staff about what effective practice looks like.</li> <li>• Synthesizes evidence over time to determine effectiveness ratings for each teacher.</li> <li>• Manages and prioritizes time to conduct observations and feedback.</li> <li>• Analyzes effectiveness data to inform professional development, staffing and leadership decisions.</li> <li>• Creates opportunities for effective teachers to support other teachers.</li> </ul>	

*NOTE: In a group setting, the three columns above could be completed jointly on a flip chart.*

2. Pick 10 competencies from your list that you think school leaders should prioritize to implement these reforms successfully. Draw a star next to those competencies. (5 minutes)
3. Review the leadership competency model you are examining. On the list from Step 1, place a check mark next to the competencies that match or are similar to competencies in the model. Circle competencies that are missing from the model. (10 minutes)
4. Answer the following reflection questions. (15 minutes)

On a scale of 1 to 5, with 1 being "not aligned" and 5 being "very aligned," how aligned is the leadership competency model with the leadership competencies you have identified as critical to the Race to the Top work?  
 NOTE: This activity could be completed as a group on a flip chart

What are two or three ideas to address gaps or areas of misalignment?

For the competencies you prioritized, what was your rationale?

What are two or three strategies that would help school districts and schools to focus and build capacity on the prioritized competencies?

## Assessing Strengths and Weaknesses

Based on research and discussions with experts, the RSN identified six areas of focus in education policy and practice that can serve as levers to build leadership for rigorous instruction:

- Defining Instructional Leadership Competencies
- Preparing Instructional Leaders
- Licensing Instructional Leaders
- Managing Instructional Leadership Performance
  - Evaluation
  - Professional Development
  - Career Pathways
  - Systems and Structures

This tool can help States and school districts begin to narrow their own focus to what they consider the most important work to improve instructional leadership. As a starting point, States and districts can examine strengths of their current policy and practices in these areas of focus and challenges that have emerged. It asks for specific evidence to support observations about both strengths and challenges. From that point, potential next steps can be envisioned.

This activity should take about 20 minutes and could be completed independently or in a group using a flip chart. This graphic organizer can help:

Strengths	Evidence	Challenges	Evidence
What should we focus on next?			

## Envisioning Policy and Practice Levers

Based on research and discussions with experts, the RSN identified six areas of focus in education policy and practice that can serve as levers to build leadership for rigorous instruction:

- Defining Instructional Leadership Competencies
- Preparing Instructional Leaders
- Licensing Instructional Leaders
- Managing Instructional Leadership Performance
  - Evaluation
  - Professional Development
  - Career Pathways
  - Systems and Structures

This tool can help States and school districts begin to think about what these levers could look like when implemented based on what one would expect to see if the levers were used successfully. This initial work can be done outside the context of the specific conditions or challenges in a State or district. This is an opportunity to think about ideal results.

This activity should take about 15 minutes, with another 15 minutes devoted to discussion. For at least five of the levers, each group member will describe an outcome that would be evident if the lever were implemented effectively. During the discussion, group members will share their outcomes taking the levers one at a time. If the group is large, it could be divided into smaller subgroups, with the levers assigned to subgroups and each subgroup asked to come up with at least three outcomes for the lever or levers it was assigned.

Instructional Leadership Definition	Preparation	Licensure	Evaluation	PD	Career Pathways	Systems and Structures
	Example: Accreditation/approval process requires preparation institutions to demonstrate presence of <u>clinical/practical experience</u> .					

## Setting Priorities and Determining Improvement Strategies

The Reform Support Network (RSN) created this tool as part of its work to assist States that won Race to the Top grants for educational reform. In creating this tool, the RSN was guided by recommendations from experts in instructional leadership who identified key areas of focus that have the greatest potential to raise leadership capacity in schools:

- Instructional Leadership Competencies
- Preparation
- Licensure
- Performance Management
  - Evaluation
  - Professional Development
  - Career Pathways
  - Systems and Structures

This tool can help States, school districts and others to assess the success of current policies and practices to support instructional leadership and to use a specific framework to identify actions that can be taken moving forward. In helping take stock and set priorities, the tool can help translate a vision for effective instructional leadership into improved interactions between teachers and leaders, which are at the core of effective leadership.

This tool will be most helpful to those who have begun to think about and discuss instructional leadership in a broader context, either by using the other tools created by the RSN or through other avenues. It is important to note that there is no right answer or single best course of action that comes from using this tool; the context of each State or school district matters in making determinations of how best to support instructional leaders.

The activities in this tool will take about two hours to complete. When completed, participants should come away with a prioritized list of areas of focus and potential strategies to address them. This will allow for action planning in subsequent discussions.

### ACTIVITY I: Assessing Efforts to Improve Instructional Leadership

1. Participants read each Quality Assessment Statement written in the Assessing Efforts table provided below. Each participant will add to or edit each statement as needed to represent his or her vision of quality. The participants will share their edits to each statement and will agree upon common statements of quality as the basis for the remaining work.
2. Each participant reflects on each Quality Assessment Statement and indicates whether he or she strongly disagrees/disagrees/agrees/strongly agrees with each statement based on his or her opinion of the status in the State or school district of that area of focus.
3. Each participant determines the urgency and impact associated with each area of focus. Using the quadrants provided, the participants will rate the degree to which the area of focus requires timely attention (urgency) and the degree to which the area will contribute to meeting the vision of effective instructional leadership.



**Example:** The star on this matrix indicates that an area that may not be as urgent in terms of needs of the State but in the long run could have a significant impact toward reaching goals.

4. Participants report on their responses and discuss them to identify areas of agreement and disagreement. The intent is not to reach consensus around either the state of implementation or the urgency and impact of an area, but rather to reflect and to expose areas of common perspectives and differences.

*NOTE: This activity can be completed using a flip chart on to which the Assessing Efforts table has been transferred. Each participant marks the chart with a marker or using sticker or Post-It to tally views on status, urgency and impact.*

## Assessing Efforts

Area of Focus		Quality Assessment Statement	Strongly Disagree	Disagree	Agree	Strongly Agree	Urgency and Impact	
Instructional Leadership Definition		Research-based competencies that indicate the knowledge, skills and attitudes needed to improve teaching effectiveness and student achievement form the basis for school leader preparation curriculum and approval, licensure decisions and performance management (evaluation, professional development and career pathways).					Urgency	
								Impact
Preparation		A sufficient number of quality school leader candidates are available for all types of schools, and recent graduates of school leader preparation programs (both traditional and alternative) are effectively prepared to lead their schools and achieve high levels of student achievement.					Urgency	
								Impact
Licensure		School leader licenses accurately reflect whether an individual has demonstrated necessary competencies and/or accomplishments to be effective leaders.					Urgency	
								Impact
Performance Management	Evaluation	Evaluations accurately differentiate performance among instructional leaders based on multiple measures including, in significant part, student growth information, provide information that is useful for improvement, and inform career decisions, including professional development, career roles/pathways and dismissal.					Urgency	
								Impact
	PD	Professional development for all instructional leaders is aligned to individual needs, achieves intended results and improves leadership competencies for leaders at all levels of effectiveness.					Urgency	
								Impact
	Career Pathways	Effective instructional leaders, including teacher leaders, mentors and other peer coaches, have opportunities to grow in their careers and be rewarded for their contributions, including receiving additional compensation and/or serving in leadership roles outside the principalship or teaching.					Urgency	
								Impact
	Systems and Structures	Data systems, technology and role structures enable the support and monitoring of instructional leadership initiatives and drive continuous improvement.					Urgency	
								Impact

## ACTIVITY II: Setting Priorities

1. Based on Activity I, participants discuss consensus views emerging about the state of work on each area of focus and its perceived urgency and impact. Participants will discuss the areas of focus in relative terms based on a review of trends apparent from their individual responses in Activity I. This work can be done by a facilitator if the group is being directed through the process by someone not taking part as a participant.
2. Using the Setting Priorities table provided, the participants will rank the areas of focus from highest priority to lowest.

### Setting Priorities

	Ranking	Area of Focus	Reasoning
Highest Priority for Improvement	1.		
	2.		
	3.		
	4.		
	5.		
Lowest Priority for Improvement	6.		

Based on the priorities established through Activity II, participants will use the following:

- Activity III if instructional leadership definition has been identified among the top three priorities
- Activity IV if preparation and/or licensure have been identified among the top three priorities
- Activity V if any of the performance management areas have been identified among the top three priorities

### ACTIVITY III: Defining Instructional Leadership

1. Participants discuss the quality and implementation of the instructional leadership competencies in their States or school districts. The RSN defines competencies as the knowledge, skills and disposition necessary for instructional leaders to improve teaching effectiveness and student achievement. It may be helpful for participants to have reviewed or have available the following two RSN documents:
  - Competencies to Meet Shifting Demands for Instructional Leadership
  - Some Promising Examples of Efforts to Build Leadership for Rigorous Instruction (Louisiana's efforts on leadership competencies, pg. 1)
2. Participants use the Defining Instructional Leadership table provided to explore strategies related to this policy and practice lever; this can be undertaken individually with discussion to report views or as a group. Participants may edit the strategies listed in the table and add other strategies in the space provided. In adding and in editing, the focus must remain on the quality of the strategy as judged by the outcomes they are believed to produce.
3. Participants rate the status and the priority of each strategy; this can be undertaken individually with discussion to report views or as a group. When considering the priority of each strategy, participants are encouraged to honor the work already underway in their States or school districts and to gauge the degree to which a strategy is expected to move a State or district toward identified outcomes that indicate improved instructional leadership. Participants can mark any strategy N/A that they deem inappropriate to their status or context.
4. Through discussion of relative ratings, participants reach a shared set of prioritized strategies.

## Defining Instructional Leadership

**Implementation Status:**  
 4: Fully implemented; 3: Partially Implemented; 2: Planning for Implementation; 1: Not Planned/Implemented  
**Priority:**  
 High, Medium, Low

	Strategies for Defining Instructional Leadership	Implementation Status	Priority
Create a competency model for instructional leadership	Understand and articulate the purpose of the instructional leadership competency model and the practices it drives.		
	Draw on research to define instructional leadership competencies that clearly articulate the State's/district's understanding of excellence and that increase student achievement. (For example, include competencies that address the instructional leader's role in both organizational management and teaching and learning.)		
Integrate competency model	Determine how the competency model will inform preparation curriculum and accreditation/ approval and what preparation program outcomes it will drive.		
	Determine how the competency model will inform licensure decisions and what licensure outcomes it will drive.		
	Determine how the competency model will inform performance management for instructional leaders, including evaluation, professional development and career pathways and what performance management outcomes it will drive.		
	Identify which leadership roles the competency model can be applied/adapted to beyond the principal, such as assistant principals and teacher leaders.		
	Clarify the agents/entities responsible for driving toward outcomes defined by the competency model, and ensure they share the State's understanding of and accountability for the model		

## ACTIVITY IV: Preparing and Licensing Instructional Leaders

1. Participants discuss the quality and implementation of preparation and licensing strategies in their States or school districts. It may be helpful for participants to have reviewed or have available the RSN document Some Promising Examples of Efforts to Build Leadership for Rigorous Instruction (New York City Leadership Academy’s Aspiring Principal Program, pg. 2, and Kentucky teacher leader licensure, pg. 3)
2. Participants use the Preparing and Licensing Instructional Leaders table to explore strategies related to this policy and practice lever; this can be undertaken individually with discussion to report views or as a group. Participants may edit the strategies listed in the table and add other strategies in the space provided. In adding and in editing, the focus must remain on the quality of the strategy as judged by the outcomes they are believed to produce.
3. Participants rate the status and the priority of each strategy; this can be undertaken individually with discussion to report views or as a group. When considering the priority of each strategy, participants are encouraged to honor the work already underway in their States or school districts and to gauge the degree to which a strategy is expected to move a State or school district toward identified outcomes that indicate improved instructional leadership. Participants can mark any strategy N/A that they deem inappropriate to their status or context.
4. Through discussion of relative ratings, participants reach a shared set of prioritized strategies.

### Preparing and Licensing Instructional Leaders

Implementation Status: 4: Fully implemented; 3: Partially Implemented; 2: Planning for Implementation; 1: Not Planned/Implemented Priority: High, Medium, Low			
	Strategies for Preparing and Licensing Instructional Leaders	Implementation Status	Priority
Ensure alignment and relevance of preparation programs	Require rigorous selection of candidates for preparation programs based on interest in school leadership, merit and potential to succeed.		
	Require curriculum alignment to instructional leadership competencies as part of accreditation and approval processes.		
	Require curriculum alignment to Common Core State Standards instructional shifts and State evaluation policy as part of accreditation and approval processes.		
	Require institutions to demonstrate presence of clinical/practical experience as a significant portion of the candidates’ experience as part of accreditation and approval processes.		
	Develop partnerships with preparation programs to refine curriculum to better meet the needs of the State and districts.		

	Strategies for Preparing and Licensing Instructional Leaders	Implementation Status	Priority
Ensure effectiveness of preparation programs	Annually report on the effectiveness of principals in improving student achievement and the percent of graduates that become school leaders by preparation institution.		
	Provide provisional approval to preparation institutions and confirm approval only after graduates have demonstrated effectiveness in improving student outcomes.		
	Provide streamlined review and approval process for preparation institutions whose graduates demonstrate consistent success in increasing student achievement.		
Remove barriers to entry	Identify and set standards for entry into instructional leadership such as exam requirements, degree requirements and lack of alternative pathway options (for example, examine out-of-state licensure requirements and adjust if restricting high-quality out-of-State candidates).		
	Develop and encourage multiple pathways for becoming a principal: high-quality traditional preparation programs and/or proven alternative preparation programs or innovative and effective district leadership development programs that emphasize residency/clinical experience.		
Align licensure standards to competencies	Consider more rigorous, performance- and student achievement-based licensure assessments and/or review and revise cut scores/establish new baselines on licensure assessments.		
	Base licensure renewal in part on student achievement and evaluation results.		
	Implement tiered licensure to better differentiate performance and support structures for principals. For example, provide provisional licenses and intensive support to new principals. Once they've proven their effectiveness, grant them full licensure.		

## ACTIVITY V: Managing Performance of Instructional Leaders

1. Participants discuss the quality and implementation of performance management of instructional leadership strategies in their States or school districts. The RSN defines performance management as the full set of State and district systems and processes for ensuring the quality of instructional leaders currently in schools. It may be helpful for participants to have reviewed or have available the RSN document Some Promising Examples of Efforts to Build Leadership for Rigorous Instruction (Hillsborough County evaluation system, pg. 5, Massachusetts professional development initiative, pg. 4, and SAM project career pathway, pg. 6)
2. Participants use the Managing Performance of Instructional Leaders table to explore strategies related to this policy and practice lever; this can be undertaken individually with discussion to report views or as a group. Participants may edit the strategies listed in the table and add other strategies in the space provided. In adding and in editing, the focus must remain on the quality of the strategy as judged by the outcomes they are believed to produce.
3. Participants rate the status and the priority of each strategy; this can be undertaken individually with discussion to report views or as a group. When considering the priority of each strategy, participants are encouraged to honor the work already underway in their States or school districts and to gauge the degree to which a strategy is expected to move a State or district toward identified outcomes that indicate improved instructional leadership. Participants can mark any strategy N/A that they deem inappropriate to their status or context.
4. Through discussion of relative ratings, participants reach a shared set of prioritized strategies.

### Managing Performance of Instructional Leaders

<p style="text-align: center;"><b>Implementation Status:</b>                      4: Fully implemented; 3: Partially Implemented; 2: Planning for Implementation; 1: Not Planned/Implemented  <b>Priority:</b>                      High, Medium, Low</p>			
	Performance Management of Instructional Leaders	Implementation Status	Priority
Systems and Structures	Create and use communication structures, monitoring mechanisms and data analyses that allow districts and States to assess and group instructional leaders based on performance, know which actions to take as a result, monitor the outcome of those actions and drive continuous improvement.		
	Clearly define the principal role in alignment with the evaluation framework, and ensure that there is adequate time and support to effectively execute the responsibilities.		
	Ensure principal supervisor role is accountable for and has ample time and support to observe, provide feedback and coach principals.		
	Develop technology to support and manage the evaluation and development process, including robust analytics to support monitoring and decision-making.		

	Performance Management of Instructional Leaders	Implementation Status	Priority
Professional Development	Implement mentoring programs that push new principals to reflect, develop and focus on leadership competencies with their experienced principal counterparts.		
	Differentiate supports based on evaluation data, experience level and development goals.		
	Provide professional development that is aligned to the leadership competencies and evaluation framework, is effective at moving principals along a continuum of performance and includes peer-to-peer collaboration and problem-solving.		
Evaluation	Develop framework for leadership evaluation based on multiple, research-based measures of performance, including student achievement.		
	Implement evaluation process that includes goal setting and regular, actionable feedback for principals.		
Career Pathways	Strategically and equitably place school leaders so that all schools are matched with high quality leaders that meet their needs.		
	Implement strategic compensation for instructional leaders, basing pay on effectiveness.		
	Provide retention bonuses to highly effective instructional leaders based on student achievement results in high-need schools.		
	Implement leadership career pathways, such as assistant principals, school administration managers, mentors and/or lead principals.		
	Develop fair and efficient mechanisms for probation and dismissal based on evaluation data.		

## Leveraging the Capacity of Partners to Support Instructional Leadership

When the RSN describes a State's capacity to improve education, it describes a context bigger than a State education agency (SEA) itself. Rather, the RSN refers to the capacity of the entire State—SEA; school districts; higher education institutions; and community, union, professional and advocacy organizations which comprise a much more abundant and flexible resource. This is especially true when these entities work together to create alignment and synergy across a decentralized and too often siloed system.

Interaction between the SEA and school districts is vital. It is not the only relationship that can lead to improvement in instructional leadership. Partners can offer a richer perspective in refining the work over time. They also present options for sustainability through joint ownership of improvement efforts.

This tool can help States and school districts identify and understand specific roles that partners can assume in supporting the development of effective instructional leaders. This work can help position States and districts to apply this understanding to their own specific context. In exploring partnerships, States and districts should keep in mind the demands of the work in light of their own capacity and that of other entities.

The activity should take about 30 minutes and could be completed individually with follow-up discussion among participants or in a group. It may be helpful for participants to have reviewed or have available the RSN document *Understanding Partnerships to Help Build Instructional Leadership*.

Considering the continuum of partner engagement, the definition of partners and the organizational roles in education reform described by the RSN, participants should consider these questions:

- In thinking about partnerships your organization currently has in its efforts to support instructional leaders, where do they fall on the continuum of engagement? In thinking about the work you want to do moving forward, where will partnerships need to fall on the continuum?
- How many of the organizational roles does your organization play in building instructional leadership?
- Are there roles your organization is playing currently that others may be able to carry out more effectively, more nimbly or with greater impact?
- Without focusing on specifics, can you identify specific roles that might be experienced more powerfully by instructional leaders if they were played by an organization other than the one currently playing the role—yes or no?
- Can you think of an organization that could be tapped to play one or more of these roles that has not been yet—yes or no?

- Do you see other roles that are important that are not on the RSN's list?
- As you think about partners, can you match roles you have thought about with capacities that the RSN has identified? Are the organizations high capacity or low capacity?

## Planning Partnerships to Build Leadership for Rigorous Instruction

When the RSN describes a State's capacity to improve education, it describes a context bigger than an SEA itself. Rather, the RSN refers to the capacity of the entire State—SEA; school districts; higher education institutions; and community, union, professional and advocacy organizations which comprise a much more abundant and flexible resource. This is especially true when these entities work together to create alignment and synergy across a decentralized and too often siloed system.

These tools can help a State or school district match partner organizations with the work to build leadership for rigorous instruction that it has identified as its highest priority. To use these tools, it may be helpful for participants to have reviewed or have available the RSN document *Understanding Partnerships to Help Build Instructional Leadership*. Also, a State or school district should have done some work to identify both priorities for improvement efforts moving forward and potential partners based on roles and capacity. It may be helpful to have used the RSN tools *Setting Priorities and Determining Improvement Strategies* and *Leveraging the Capacity of Partners to Support Instructional Leadership* or other activities to probe priorities and partners.

The tools could be completed individually with follow-up discussion among participants or in a group. As this is specific planning based on the unique circumstances of both the planning process and the place, the amount of time needed to complete the work varies.

In the first part of this work, participants think expansively about potential partners they could recruit. At this point, it is important to identify as complete a list of partners as possible and to think beyond traditional organizations such as higher education institutions to include non-traditional or unprecedented partners as well. Once participants have prepared a list of potential partners either as individuals or in a group, they can match partners to their highest priority strategies for improving instructional leadership using the organizer provided. A partner may be useful to carry out more than one of the strategies. Before leaving this activity, participants should reflect on whether all partners have been represented in the activity.

In the second part of this work, participants assess the capacity of partners to carry out the strategies. Understanding that all of the strategies being considered have already been categorized as high priorities, participants should use the matrix provided to appraise potential partnerships along two dimensions—the relative importance of a strategy among all of the high priorities and the relative capacity of a partner. Using the matrix quadrants, participants can determine if high priority work is matched by high capacity support, and to plan accordingly if there are gaps considered critical. The matrix can indicate where there may be excess capacity that can be channeled to other needs (found in the High Capacity/Low Importance quadrant) and where the

need for additional capacity is most pressing based on identified priorities (the Low Capacity/High Importance quadrant). In this regard, it is vital to consider the scale of the support required; a partner may be well prepared to serve three school districts but less capable of mounting a statewide effort.

Upon completion, participants should have a consensus around five to seven strategies to improve instructional leadership and a clear sense of partners and their capacity to support the work. This knowledge helps inform action planning.

Area of Focus/Policy & Practice Lever	Partner(s)
1.	
2.	
3.	

### Role Matrix

Importance of Lever		Highest importance High capacity
	Lowest importance Low capacity	
Capacity of Partners		

## Planning Actions to Build Leadership for Rigorous Instruction

Need and good intentions alone will not allow a State or school district to effectively support its instructional leaders. In the same way that instructional leadership is not some vague construct, but rather specific actions that require specific skills and capacity, the efforts a State or district must undertake involve well-articulated strategies that match the highest priorities and partners marshaled to the work based on roles and capacity.

This tool can help a State or school district move toward action by capturing the key elements necessary. To use this tool effectively, participants must have examined:

- The competencies they consider most essential in instructional leadership.
- The strengths and weaknesses evident in existing efforts to support instructional leadership.
- The areas of focus they consider most likely to yield improved instructional leadership and the strategies that they can use as levers in policy and practice to lift up instructional leaders.
- The partners they can muster to support leaders with greater strength and success.

The RSN has created other tools that can help a State or school district to explore these topics, or other activities can be used. The key is for participants to have thought deeply and in detail about these matters before trying to plan. As this is specific planning based on the unique circumstances of both the planning process and the place, the amount of time needed to complete the work varies.

In using the tool, participants should list five to seven critical strategies for improving instructional strategies and identify partners, steps to implement including the most immediate next steps, timeline, and individuals who are responsible for the action. Once that work has been completed, participants should consider:

- The feasibility of a strategy in relation to the timeline set
- The readiness and willingness of the partners to assume their roles and any time and effort required to grow partner capacity
- The alignment of the plan to other work underway or planned

If necessary, the plan should be adjusted to reflect the conclusions of this additional scrutiny. In concluding, participants should agree to a process to follow up on progress to implement the plan.

Strategy to Build Instructional Leadership	Partners	Actions to Successfully Implement Strategies	Timeline	Immediate Next Step	Person with Responsibility
1.					
2.					
3.					
4.					
5.					
6.					
7.					

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