



Voices from the States

Thinking About What It Takes Tool

States that have received Race to the Top grants are accustomed to examining needed changes in teaching and learning through the lens of Race to the Top's three areas of focus. Several States assisted by the Reform Support Network (RSN) used this tool, based on those three areas, to advance their examination of leadership competencies.

While the State teams worked independently, many of their responses were consistent in describing critical knowledge and skills for effective instructional leadership. Most States saw the starting point for aligning curriculum, instruction and assessment to college- and career-ready standards (CCRS), for example, as a deep understanding of both the content in CCRS and the instructional shifts they demand. Beyond that, States identified the collection and analysis of data, including implementing appropriate assessments for monitoring progress, as vital to the work of alignment. Finally, States indicated that instructional leaders must have the ability to set high expectations, create a shared vision for reaching them and make sense of the needed change for others in the school.

In considering the leadership needed to evaluate and develop teacher effectiveness, most States again described a mix of knowledge and skills. In this instance, the knowledge was a deep understanding of effective teaching practice. The skills involved the ability to coach teachers, including having difficult conversations and offering reflective questions, to convey that understanding

of teaching. States also described elements of change management such as building a common vocabulary and establishing trust and credibility individually and for the change process. Finally, several States included skills for managing human capital—the selection and retention of effective teachers—as critical competencies.

States emphasized management of rapid change in describing the leadership competencies needed to turn around struggling schools; words such as “urgency,” “drive,” and “stamina” were common in States' work. In their responses, States made clear that cultural change in a persistently struggling school is at the core of an instructional leader's work. At the same time, States emphasized the capacity to communicate well beyond the faculty—with parents, partners in reform and the broader community, including business leaders. Finally, States listed competencies around use of data and the establishment of high expectations in this area of focus as well.

For the most part, States rated their own leadership competency models highly in terms of their alignment to the competencies that had been deemed the most important. Participants most commonly rated their own State's model as a four on a five-point scale. In the one instance in which a State team's ratings hovered around two and three, the State determined that better defining instructional leadership competencies should be its first priority.

Many States also cited similar strategies—professional development, communications and technology deployment—for convincing local educational agencies to prioritize their own efforts to build competencies that the State had identified

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.

as most important. A number of RSN States consider professional development they have delivered to instructional leaders, most often principals, around CCRS and new educator effectiveness systems to be successful. States see the diffusion of knowledge and skills through professional development as a handy and essential tool for raising competencies. At the same time, several States acknowledged that providing professional development to all principals, or even simply those in greatest need, can tax the capacity of the State education agency. This is particularly true, States indicated, if they seek to embed the professional development into

the actual work of school leaders. Clear, consistent communication has several benefits, States said. It represents a variation of professional development through the dissemination of best practice. It also builds trust and credibility—important elements of sustainable change—by offering transparency around the specific reforms as well as the underlying reasons they are being made. States also described technology that has been developed with certain competencies in mind, such as using data to identify educator needs, and that makes it easier for leaders to demonstrate those competencies.

Align curriculum, instruction and assessment to CCRS	Evaluate and develop teacher effectiveness	Turn around struggling schools
<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Understands curriculum, instruction, assessment and their relationship • Understands CCRS and the instructional shifts they demand/Expresses commitment to CCRS/ Understands student mastery of CCRS/Ensures shared vision for high quality delivery of CCRS through instructional shifts/Knows standards and assessment practices • Understands strategies for differentiating instruction • Leads a coherent change process/Articulates a vision • Assesses faculty capacity against the needed instructional shifts • Sets high expectations for all • Develops staff capacity to create assessments • Develops teacher leaders to develop curriculum • Uses data to analyze progress toward students' mastery of CCRS/Establishes clear process for data reviews/Uses data to answer "What now?"/ Uses formative assessment to inform instruction/ Monitors effectiveness of instructional programs/Uses multiple assessment strategies • Creates opportunities for collaborative planning/ Creates learning communities of teachers/Builds collaborative learning groups • Schedules time for professional development • Thinks analytically 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Fosters a common vocabulary for teaching and learning/Makes clear what good instruction looks like/Articulates gaps between expectations and performance • Understands rigor and student supports • Carries out evaluations with fidelity/Provides effective, constructive feedback/Provides timely formal and informal feedback/Uses rubrics consistently • Forms a bridge between evaluation and other reforms/Connects evaluation and curriculum context • Ensures professional development that is aligned, differentiated and sustained/Coaches teachers through meaningful feedback focused on instruction/Asks good, instructionally focused questions/Asks questions to guide development of reflective practice/Provides data driven, not behavior driven, feedback/Provides feedback in clear, concise way • Identifies and retains effective teachers/ Manages talent • Communicates about the 'why' of changes, not simply the 'what' • Creates safe and respectful environment/Creates culture of trust • Ensures congruency between policy and practice • Thinks analytically 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Understands school and community culture/ Exhibits cultural competence • Fosters a philosophy of no excuses/Holds effective difficult conversations/Disposed to urgency/Creates and maintains a sense of urgency • Sets goals that are both ambitious and feasible/ Promotes and wins buy-in for shared goals • Perseveres against the most difficult challenges/ Provides courage and stamina to the change process • Provides laser-like focus on highest leverage strategies/Puts in place high-yield, research-based strategies/Shifts focus to learning • Recruits and retains effective staff • Communicates effectively outside of the school to garner support/Identifies internal and external resources/Partners with higher education and the private sector • Establishes culture of high expectations/Models high expectations • Improves school climate • Ensures additional support for struggling students • Develops effective school improvement plans/ Conducts annual audits of performance • Eliminates barriers and unrelated instructional activities • Demonstrates instructional competency • Displays transparency around accountability • Thinks analytically • Demonstrates comfort in sharing leadership

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