



Sustainability Series
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Planning for Success

Integrating Planning Processes to Sustain Outcomes



Welcome

Sustainability Series

Number 4

Integrating Planning Processes to Enhance and Sustain Reading First Outcomes

At all levels—school, district, and state—planning plays a significant role in meeting the goal of all students becoming proficient readers. Indeed, it is fair to say that success in implementing and sustaining evidence-based reading programs is dependent on effective planning.

This brief, part of a series addressing key aspects of sustainability, is intended for educators at any level whose job description includes developing or implementing planning processes to raise student reading achievement. K-3 principals and school improvement teams may use the brief to understand how their planning efforts fit within a bigger picture of district and state planning and how they can tighten the logic underlying their plans, irrespective of any particular planning format they use. Further, district and state planners may benefit from using this brief when they come together for their respective planning efforts.

Other aspects of sustaining school-wide reading models that are based on scientific research are addressed by other briefs in this series. All currently available briefs may be found at <http://www.ed.gov/programs/readingfirst/support/sustaining.html>

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Sustainability is the ability of a program to operate on its core beliefs and values (its reading culture) and use them to guide essential and inevitable program adaptations over time while maintaining improved outcomes.

*Adapted from Century
and Levy, 2002*

Effective Plans can be Powerful Tools for Change 4

Take planning in the right direction and avoid common pitfalls.

Planning Purposes Evolve Over Time 5

See a range of purposes for planning in the Reading First program, from applying for funds, to implementing key program elements, to institutionalizing those elements, to sustaining improved reading outcomes.

Strategies to Unify Planning Efforts 6

Learn practical ways to create coherence in plans at the state, district, and school levels.

Making Planning Efforts Mutually Supportive 8

Find out key planning needs at school, district, and state levels—and how each level can help the others plan well.

Writing Effective Plans 10

Three guidelines that will assist your planning at any level.

Using Planning to Build a Culture of Improvement 12

Learn how planning can bring people together around important reading goals and engage them in meaningful action.

Schools are spawning grounds for plans. Whenever there is improvement to be made or resources to expend, there is a plan to be written.

Many schools have multiple plans, all requiring data, ideas, and time to generate—and all seeking to land the “big catch” of significantly improved outcomes.



EFFECTIVE PLANS CAN BE Powerful Tools for Change

We put a great deal of faith into our planning.

Is this faith in planning justified?

Yes...

- ◆ if planning focuses on implementation of evidence-based programs in reading;
- ◆ if planning builds systems and strategies that ensure every child masters the material;
- ◆ if planning is cohesive across the school, district, and state levels; or
- ◆ if plans provide layers of support for implementation of evidence-based instructional systems.

No...

- ◆ if plans are unnecessarily proliferated, and compete with each other;
- ◆ if plans are used for the sole purpose of meeting federal and state requirements; or
- ◆ if plans do not show a clear connection between needs, strategies, supports, and measurements of implementation and impact.

In the field of education, a great deal of emphasis is placed on the potential of planning in improving schools and raising student achievement. This is certainly true for reading. Every state accountability system makes student reading proficiency a primary focus and includes planning as a mechanism to bring about desired changes.

District strategic plans and school improvement plans typically address reading achievement, among other goals. The common wisdom has been that plans should: (1) identify needs through the analysis of data, (2) set measurable goals and objectives that, if achieved, address those needs, and (3) describe the strategies that, if implemented well, will enable the goals and objectives to be achieved. We put a great deal of faith in the ability of educators and policymakers at all levels to write plans that, if implemented, will result in the kinds of change in reading practices that will raise student reading achievement—but is this faith justified?

Planning that focuses on implementation of evidence-based reading programs that ensure that every child acquires the knowledge and develops the skills to be a proficient reader can have tremendous impact. Similarly, planning that is cohesive across the school, district, and state levels and provides layers of support for implementation of evidence-based instructional systems can play a vital role in maintaining student achievement.

On the other hand, plans may fall short of their potential to guide improvement if they are plans that are used primarily to meet federal and state requirements and fail to present an improvement logic that clearly describes the relationship among (1) the identified needs, (2) the proposed goals and objectives, (3) the strategies that will be used to achieve those goals and objectives, and (4) the ways in which the implementation of the strategies and the achievement of the goals and objectives will be monitored and evaluated.

Planning Purposes Evolve Over Time

Educators in the Reading First community have developed plans for many reasons, some specific to Reading First, and some that blend with broader planning in the context of

standards-based education reform. Here's what the landscape of Reading First planning looks like:

1. Obtaining Reading First Funds

States first engaged in planning to obtain funds to help improve K-3 reading programs and increase the numbers of proficient readers. As states worked on the first plan (the application for Reading First funds), they established a framework and support infrastructures reflecting the five components of effective reading instruction.

2. Implementing the Practices of Reading First

From the application to the Reading First grant, state and district Reading First program leaders developed practical plans that described how Reading First resources would be used to effectively implement the proposed practices over the course of several years. As state and district leaders gained experience implementing the practices required by Reading First, they found that they needed to update implementation plans, building on what was implemented well and strengthening areas where implementation was weak.

3. Improving Student Performance

As schools began to obtain information from assessments, they began to identify the students who were learning well and achieving specific benchmarks and the students who were not adequately learning the knowledge and skills described by specific benchmarks. This information required school level staff to begin to plan what was needed to help those students who were not making sufficient progress. Such planning is frequently referred to as "planning for improvement." At this point, planning transitions from a focus on how to implement the Reading First components and their related practices to a focus on how to improve instruction and the instructional supports that students who are not making adequate progress receive. Such improvement planning addresses questions like the following:

- Which students are not making sufficient progress in learning to read and on which benchmarks?
- Why are these students having difficulty making progress on those benchmarks?
- Given possible explanations for their lack of progress in reading, what do we need to change?
- How will we implement those changes?
- How will we monitor the implementation of those changes and their effects on student reading outcomes?

4. Sustaining the Evidence-based Reading Model

Now, the Reading First community is being asked to plan to sustain what has been accomplished with Reading First funds, given that some districts are reaching the end of their grant periods, while other districts are expecting to receive reduced federal funds for their Reading First schools. Planning for sustainability may require educators to address questions such as:

- What reading instruction practices need to be continued at their current high level of implementation to maintain or improve student achievement in reading?
 - What improvements are needed to be successful with the few remaining students who are still not proficient readers?
 - How can we continue to monitor what is being learned through reading-related research, and incorporate those lessons into practice?
 - What infrastructures are needed to keep effective reading instruction practices in place and how can we build them?
- Planning for sustainability is the logical progression to institutionalizing something that has been successfully implemented. The evidence-based approach to teaching reading established through Reading First is now simply viewed as the best way to help all students become proficient readers.



Strategies to Unify Planning Efforts

All educators are familiar with the proliferation of plans. It is the natural result of the legitimate tendency of each funded program to establish its own planning and accountability requirements. It is also the legitimate result of school, district, and state needs to demonstrate

Multiple plans are only a problem when planning efforts are fragmented and lead to competing priorities and efforts.

improvement strategies they are pursuing and how they are accountable to a range of interested parties—from parents, to local school boards, to state governing bodies.

Reading First is no different from any other program in this regard.

Multiple plans are only a problem when planning efforts are fragmented and lead to

competing priorities and efforts. No one intends to set up fragmented and competing efforts; rather, proliferation of plans often results from staff attempting to do their jobs thoroughly. To reduce the possibility of fragmented planning efforts and competing priorities, schools, districts, and states need to work hard to coordinate their planning efforts. Here are four strategies that can be used to foster such coordination:

Strategy 1: Keep a Shared Vision Visible During Planning

At all planning sessions, keep visible the shared vision of what students are to be learning in order to become proficient readers. Ideally this vision should be found in the state's reading standards and in the tasks and assessments used to assess students' progress in achieving those standards.

Strategy 2: Review All Reading-related Plans to Ensure They Contribute to the Shared Vision

Review all plans from any source that identifies needed improvements in reading achievement and that propose specific changes in reading-related instruction and supports to address those needs. Ensure that proposed changes will contribute to the shared vision regarding student reading achievement, as well as the reading-related practices that will support achievement.

Strategy 3: Define a Keystone Plan

At each level—school, district, state—define one plan as a keystone plan, that is, one to which all other plans relate. At the school level, this is likely a plan for continuous improvement that is updated yearly; at district and state levels, it is likely a

strategic plan representing the respective agencies as a whole. The keystone plan should be broad enough that it unifies all programs, initiatives, and strategies in service of highly valued goals, and builds the infrastructures needed to support achievement of the vision and mission. As enacted, there will be spin-off plans addressing practical matters of implementing the keystone plan's component parts. Paying attention to the relationships between plans at each level will ensure

a consistent approach to supporting scientifically based reading instruction.

Strategy 4: Monitor and Revisit Your Plans

Establish regular communication to keep planning efforts unified. Remember, plans are future-oriented documents and need continuous updating in response to the factors working for and against the goals, as well as student outcomes.

Having a group that is charged with minding the coordination of all efforts through the keystone plan may be helpful as new initiatives emerge. This group can evaluate new initiatives and priorities and make a judgment as to whether they can be incorporated into existing keystone plans as further support for achieving the vision and mission or if they will compete with the plan in an unproductive way and should therefore be deflected or deferred.

Sample Plans: State, District, and School Level

	State Level	District Level	School Level
Keystone Plans	State strategic plan: reading goals reflect broad reading achievement targets; broadly stated improvement strategies are based on implementation of evidence-based reading programs.	District strategic plan: reading goals specific to current district performance; broadly stated improvement strategies that are based on implementation of evidence-based reading programs.	School improvement plan: specific reading goals based on trends in student performance; improvement strategies reflect specific support needed for teachers to implement the school-wide reading model.
Related Plans	<p>(1) State literacy plan (provides details on reading or language arts improvement strategies, providing a fully articulated plan for use of evidence-based reading practices K-12)</p> <p>(2) Planning related to use of state and federal program funds (ensures program funding is targeted to supporting powerful evidence-based reading programs)</p> <p>(3) Plans related to the state-wide support system for under-performing schools and districts (ensures high need schools have the intensive support they need to implement evidence-based reading programs)</p>	<p>(1) The district consolidated application for state and federal funds (targets available funds in support of reading improvement strategies in the strategic plan)</p> <p>(2) Plans developed addressing new education initiatives being rolled out by the state (incorporates new initiatives into the bigger picture of the approach to reading improvement in the strategic plan rather than treating new initiatives as isolated tasks)</p> <p>(3) Plans related to other district initiatives or activities addressing reading achievement (ensures that early childhood, family literacy, and reading initiatives offered by community-based organizations are consistent with scientifically based reading instruction)</p>	<p>(1) Notes from grade level team meetings on instructional planning</p> <p>(2) Teacher lesson plans</p> <p>(3) Plans related to services and interventions provided to students with most severe reading difficulties</p> <p>(4) Plans for teacher professional development</p> <p>Although some schools have many plans—related to particular programs or triggered by identification for improvement, it is our position that schools would ideally follow the “one school, one plan” rule, combining all the potentially fragmented parts into one guiding plan geared to continuous improvement until the target of all students proficient in reading is reached</p>



Making Planning Efforts Mutually Supportive

Schools, districts, and states each have primary needs related to planning. Meeting these needs can be a challenge, depending on the way planning efforts are handled at the levels just above or below.

School Needs

Schools need to implement effective continuous improvement planning processes start with data analysis showing student needs with particular reading skills.

Districts can help by...

...framing the process for school level planning from the student level out so that schools have leadership and technical assistance in using this approach.

...planning their reading professional development to schools based on student needs.

...building reading infrastructures—such as tools for collecting and organizing data from reading assessments—that make the school's planning task easier and more effective.

States can help by...

...developing a planning process, planning guidance documents, and data systems that present a vision of effective planning working from the student level out and by building district capacity to support their schools.

... providing concrete illustrations for reading planning as part of their guidance, although the state's planning process will be broader than just reading.

District Needs

Districts need to:

- (1) develop a district strategic plan to focus action and provide accountability to the local board of education;
- (2) determine best uses of federal and state program funds and incorporate these into planning; and
- (3) build the capacity of schools to write and implement improvement plans that will raise student achievement.

States can help by...

...providing a vision and a process that unifies local strategic planning with the local consolidated grant for federal and state education funds.

...building district capacity to effectively coordinate funds to meet school needs.

... providing districts with specific guidance on coordinating federal and state funds to cover costs related to high quality implementation of evidence-based reading programs.

...modeling a cross-program approach within the SEA to reach state goals.

... providing specific, supportive feedback to districts on their planning processes, through monitoring and technical assistance.

Schools can help by...

...providing the district with sound information on the implementation of their school-wide reading model, including needs for staffing, professional development, curricula and assessments, or other resources that are critical to ensuring the success of their program.

State Needs

States need to provide oversight and guidance for schools in reaching state reading standards, especially schools that have been formally identified for improvement; to disburse federal and state funds to districts; and to monitor use of these funds.

Districts can help by...

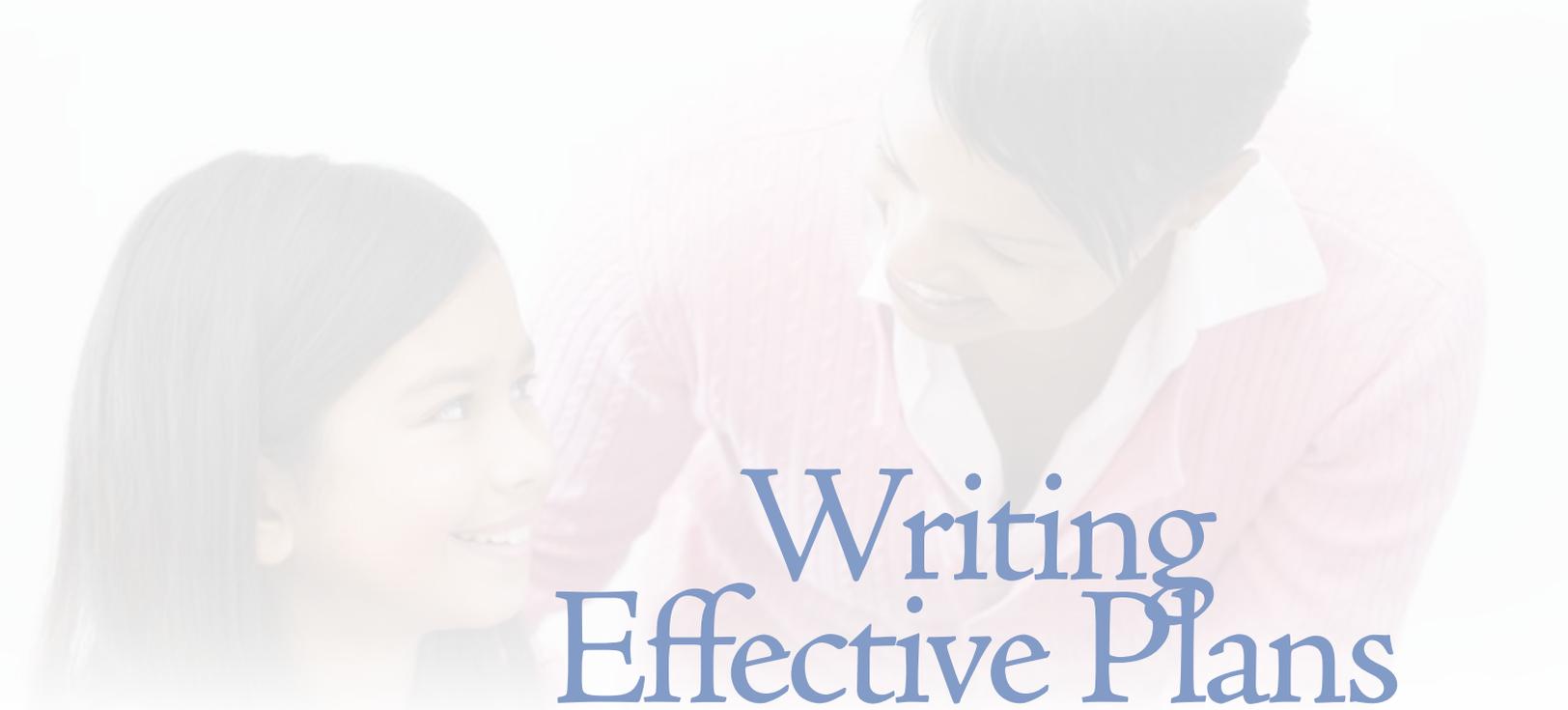
...working in partnership with states as they develop coordinated support systems, including planning models.

... providing feedback so state support activities are based in realities that district offices face.

... conducting high quality evaluation of the implementation and impact of their evidence-based reading programs and use findings to update or modify their plans.

Schools can help by...

... sharing their successes with their school-wide reading model, including how they used planning as a guide for action, and thereby serve as an example and inspiration to others.



Writing Effective Plans

Plans at any level—school, state, or district—that address reading achievement can be strengthened by following three guidelines:

Planning Guideline 1: Start with a Clear, Highly Valued Goal

The goal of Reading First is for all third-grade students to be able to read grade-level texts proficiently. There is a broad consensus among policy makers that this is a goal that they would like to see the primary grades achieve. Most parents would also like this goal achieved. After attending school a few weeks or months, most new-to-school students come to see “learning to read” as a goal that they want to achieve. In general, K-3 educators want to achieve this goal with their students. Such a goal needs to be accompanied by descriptions of:

- ◆ The kinds of third-grade level texts that students are expected to be able to read;

1. Start with a goal to be achieved and determine how the achievement will be monitored and assessed.

2a. Generate possible explanations and determine the most plausible ones regarding why the goal has not been achieved.

2b. Identify the changes that need to be made to achieve the goal and determine how their achievement will be monitored and assessed.

3. Implement the activities through which the changes will be made and determine how their achievement will be monitored and assessed.

- ◆ The specific reading-related skills the students are to be able to demonstrate (such as increasing reading fluency, expanding vocabulary, monitoring their comprehension and selecting appropriate strategies when they do not understand, and relating information in text to other experiences); and
- ◆ The ways in which samples of students’ reading will be collected and scored, including an explanation of why any assessments used are valid and reliable for the purpose intended.

Planning Guideline 2: Defining a Theory of Action

Typically, a plan begins with a goal or a need to improve, it proposes changes that, if made, would result in goal achievement or improvement, and it ends with a detailed description of the activities to be implemented to help staff

involved make the proposed changes.

However, this typical model of planning can be strengthened in two ways. First, each step can be elaborated and made more precise by describing just how their achievement will be monitored and assessed. Second, the basis for the proposed changes can be strengthened, if the planners generate possible explanations for why a goal is not currently being achieved or why an improvement is not currently being made, and then, systematically gather information that helps them decide which are the most plausible explanations for why the goal is not currently being achieved or the improvement is not currently being made. By adding this step, the planners make explicit their “theory of action.” This more elaborate planning framework is illustrated in the figure on the previous page.

Planning Guideline 3: Think of Your Planning Effort as a Series of Layers

Think of your planning effort as part of a series of layers that work from the student level outward.

Student Level Planning in the form of individual learning plans, IEPs, or students whose progress is followed through a Response to Intervention process is the most fine-grained planning and is sharply focused on individual needs.

Classroom Level Instructional Planning is the next layer—which students need support with which skills and how they respond to instruction that is provided. The emphasis is on discovering why particular students are having difficulties, addressing those factors in instruction and tracking the progress of different improvement strategies. It is often effective to conduct instructional planning at the classroom level in grade level teams to facilitate exchange of ideas.

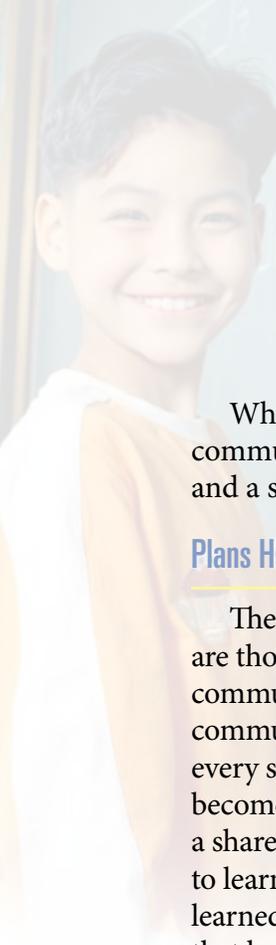
School Level Improvement Planning captures the general trends in student needs,

elaborates general explanations of student performance, and identifies school level changes that need to be made and how these will be accomplished.

District Level Planning captures general trends across schools, explains why schools are not meeting reading targets and directs resources to address those needs. Direct support from district staff may be provided or other support providers available on a contract basis may be used.

State Level Planning sets reading targets at the broadest level and establishes a state support system that focuses on use of evidence-based reading programs as a primary improvement strategy within their overall approach to school improvement planning.





Using Planning to Build a Culture of Improvement

When planning is done well, it creates a community of adults that has a shared mission and a shared practice.

Plans Help Reading Culture

The most successful Reading First schools are those whose leaders, staff, parents, and community members have become a school-community that (1) is committed to helping every student who enters their building to become a proficient reader, (2) has developed a shared understanding of what students need to learn to become proficient readers, (3) has learned to implement research-based practices that help their students to become proficient readers, (4) is constantly monitoring student progress, and takes action whenever it notices that a student's progress is beginning to decline, (5) has developed structures and processes that help its members to “problem-solve” students who are not making sufficient progress (e.g., instructional support teams, child study teams), and (6) has developed a system of interventions that helps them take actions when a student's progress falters – interventions that facilitate finding additional time and help for the students and that involve the use of instructional strategies and resources that the students do not experience in their classes.

Creating Community through Member Involvement

To plan in ways that foster community development requires thoughtful planning of how every potential member of a community might be involved in the development of the plan. For example, members can be involved

in defining the structure of plans, providing content input or review, or introducing the plan to various stakeholder groups.

Maintain a Community's Commitment—Treat all Plans as Living Documents

Once engaged, stakeholders need a reason to stay engaged. Involving the reading community in making sense of on-going data on implementation and outcomes of improvement activities, maintains a high level of interest and involvement.

Conclusion

Do you need to create a plan for sustaining the improved reading outcomes accomplished with Reading First funds? Look to existing planning models and processes in your school, district, or state and consider how these can be used to deepen and expand the implementation and institutionalization of your evidence-based reading program.

Help make district planning efforts coherent by: keeping the focus on a vision for reading achievement, promoting a review of all district plans to ensure that they contribute to the district's shared vision, define one plan as the keystone plan that unifies all programs, and monitor and revisit the plan on a regular basis.

Planning effectively is a challenging task, but the reward of helping each and every student achieve is worth the effort.



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