

# THE BEST-LAID PLANS

---

## A FRAMEWORK FOR EVALUATING THIS YEAR'S GOALS

### TRANSCRIPT



**THE PRINCIPAL CENTER**

BUILDING CAPACITY FOR INSTRUCTIONAL LEADERSHIP

# HOW TO LOOK BACK

Welcome everyone to The Best-Laid Plans: A Framework For Evaluating This Year's Goals. I'm your host Justin Baeder from The Principal Center where it's our mission to help you build capacity for instructional leadership in your organization. Let's talk about our focus question for today and that is how can we review our goals and plans from the past year in order to do even better next year? So, this is a program where we're focused on looking back we're focused on examining the progress we've made and comparing that to our intentions, to our goals that we began the year with, and we want to see what progress we've made and figure out what we can learn from that. So, I take the perspective of organizational learning in a lot of my models and approaches for different aspects of school leadership and today is no different. We're looking at what we've accomplished, what we have done, and also what we have not done, and not accomplished, and the goals that we haven't hit because we need to learn from that. We need to figure out what worked well, what can we do different, and what needs to happen in the coming year to take things to the next level as a school—so an organizational learning perspective.

A couple of things that you will take away from our time today—first how to use improvement mapping to put your data in context and to help you make improvement decisions. We'll talk about what an improvement map is and what a theory of action is and we might even work through a couple of examples of that using your improvement strategies—we'll map those out and figure out how they're supposed to work. we will talk briefly about the four types of goals and just about everything we're going to talk about today we have more in depth content on I'm going to tie a couple of different things together and then if you would like to go into more depth more detail on any of those topics I can refer you to our different courses that zoom in to more detail on those topics.

So, the four types of goals how they fit together to create a coherent plan. we'll look at the idea of Big Indicators which I have capitalized because I made it up as a thing for this webinar hard to kind of help us think about the sources of data that we might look at from year to year to help us gauge our progress and how we can use those to make data-driven decisions for the coming year. We'll also talk about the flip side of data and how if we're too data-driven that can actually be a bad thing and I think instead of just being data driven, we need professional judgment driven and not lose our heads about data. And finally we'll talk about fidelity of implementation, how to assess that and how to think about that, and how to move things forward when we're not as fully faithful to a model or we haven't fully implemented a model perhaps the way we thought we have.

So if that sounds good to you we will jump right in to our content. I want to again say welcome to everyone who is joining us. I'm assuming that you know who I am

so I won't belabor that, but my name is Justin Baeder and I started The Principal Center about five years ago after a 10-year career with Seattle Public Schools as a principal and of course teacher before that. I'm a Solution tree author, finishing up my doctorate at the University of Washington. Okay Emily has been putting together a workbook based on our outline and if you would like to follow along with that you can go to [principalcenter.com/plans-workbook](http://principalcenter.com/plans-workbook), so feel free to print that out as we go along.

Let's jump right in to the idea of looking back on the previous year. When school is out it is a nice time to be able to look back on the previous year. Of course, we don't have to wait till school's out, you can look back anytime and say how are we doing? What has our progress been? Where do we need to maybe adjust? Maybe we need to revise our goals? Maybe we need to revise our approach to achieving those goals? But looking back at the organizational level is just as important as reflecting on our practice is at the individual level for educators.

So I want to pose to you four questions that are based on the four types of goals that we'll talk about in just a moment, four questions that can help you look back on the previous year, and the first is very basic; did we do what we intended to do? When we started this year, we had some plans for what we were going to accomplish, what actions we were going to take, and a very simple question we can of course ask ourselves is did we do that? Did we take the action that we intended to take? And that question gets at what I call a Practice Goal. You know, did we say we were going to use exit tickets at the end of every class period? Maybe your middle school decided that exit tickets were just going to be something you did this year as a practice across the school. So of course, an obvious starting point for you're looking back reflecting at the school level is did we actually do that? Did we follow through? And that is a behavioral question for the grown-ups in the school. It's a matter of either we took the action or we did not, either we took that action consistently, or maybe we started for a while and then it kind of fell off, or maybe we had some inconsistency but let's get into that question in our first act of reflection, did we do what we intended to do?

And then from there we can ask a results-oriented question based on our Progress Goals or SMART goals. Looking at our student data, did we get the results we wanted to get? Did we get the test scores that we expected? did we get the learning gains however we measured them that we wanted to get? so that is kind of an outcome measure.

But then in our third question, we're going to jump back into an action measure so notice that these kind of alternate between actions and results or outcomes. And the third type of goal is a Phase Goal, we'll talk about what that is in just a moment. But the question that we can ask ourselves is, did we get what we wanted to do done? Did we accomplish the milestone that we wanted to this year? Did we, you know, if



we had a school goal of starting an after-school program, did we actually start that after-school program? If we wanted to hire a new librarian and create a makerspace, did we do that? Did it get done? And think of these more as accomplishments than ongoing actions when we're talking about Phase Goals as opposed to Practice goals. So, did we achieve those big milestones that we intended to?

And then ultimately, we need to end up with a big-picture assessment of the outcomes that we're creating and that is to address our Purpose Goal was this really what we wanted? Did we get the results we intended, not just in terms of data, and not just in terms of scores on a test, but did we get the results we wanted for our kids? Did we create the community that we wanted to for them? did we change their lives the way that we wanted to? did we make a difference in our community the way we wanted to? So I think that alternation between, "what did we do," and "what results did we get," is a really good way to look back.

And I hope that it's a useful framework even if you had to leave now and didn't get to watch the rest of this I hope that would be a useful framework for you in your own reflections, in guiding your staff to reflect on the previous year, in preparing for the coming year maybe your staff has already gone and you're thinking ahead to what you do with staff when they return for summer professional development before the school year starts. Four simple questions—did we do what we intended to do? Did we get the results we wanted in terms of data quantitative terms? Did we get what we wanted to accomplish, and then was this really what we wanted? Did we accomplish outcomes that really matter?

And those questions are rooted in four types of goals that we'll look at in just a moment, but before we break those down a little bit and get into some more detail on what each type of goal means I want to ask you—thinking about your school—what did you accomplish in terms of big visible Phase or milestone goals this year? And a Phase Goal—or a milestone goal— you want to think of as a school level accomplishment. Perhaps it was an event, more likely it's some sort of program, it's some sort of structure it's some sort of system, that is visible everyone can say, "oh yes we did that this year. There it is, it's right over there, or it happens on Thursdays." Whatever the nature of the accomplishment is, its visible to everyone, it's obvious that it's done, you can tell that is a real thing now, and that it is in place—you know the milestone has been accomplished.

So, in defining a Phase goal that way, I'm kind of distinguishing that from the kind of improvement or the kind of activity where you might say, "well we want to do a little bit better at X this year," that's not what we're talking about here with a phase goal we're talking about a major accomplishment within your school community. So, did you create a new program? did you create a makerspace? Did you hire a staff member did you adopt a new curriculum? Did you train staff on a new curriculum or a new approach? What was that in your school?

Now there is one more question that we might want to ask about things that we have quote-unquote accomplished and that is fidelity of implementation. So, we're going to get there, we're going to end today by asking some questions about fidelity and looking at what we can do if that is not quite where we want it to be. So, a key type of reflection a key type of looking back is what did we actually do? And in this Phase goal reflection we're looking at just the visible accomplishments the milestones that you've reached as a school, but of course we also want to think about on an ongoing basis, did we do it we intended to do? If we said we would have a daily practice, or a weekly practice of something, if we said we would have weekly climate assemblies, did we do that? Because we've got to look at that behavior level as well and then we'll look at the data—the progress monitoring data— as well as our Purpose goals and whether we're in alignment with those.

So, the problem with data, we're going to talk a little bit about the kind of interplay between data and decision making here. The problem with data is that when we get data about what I call Progress goals, we can tell if we've achieved the goals we set out to. That's very clear, that's the whole point, is that when we measure things and we look at our data, we know if we've hit our goals or not. But there are two things that data alone does not tell us— it doesn't tell why we got the results that we got, and if we didn't get those results, it doesn't tell us what we failed to do or what we could have done that would have given us those results. And of course, that's pretty obvious, you know, the data doesn't speak entirely for itself, it speaks to outcomes. But I think there's been a big push in our profession in recent years to become data-driven.

You know, like data-driven is supposed to be a good thing and I've seen that a lot of organizations hire leaders on the basis of their ability to be data-driven, and I think it's important to be fluent with data, I think it's important to understand how to use data, but I think an important part of understanding how to use data is to understand that data does not tell you what to do. Data tells you if you got the results you wanted but does not tell you what action you need to take next. For that you need professional judgment, you need to become an informed leader who is clear on your strategies and who knows how to make decisions about the current situation, figure out what's going well and what's not in response to that data because the data itself does not tell you what response is best.

But I think a certain pattern tends to recur when we don't get the results we're expecting or wanting—we tend to add more and more activity, more and more initiatives, more and more curriculum, more and more programs, when we don't get the results that we wanted. And that churn of activity is exactly what we addressed in the Instructional Leadership Intensive. We're helping everyone get really clear on the programs that are in place, the improvement efforts that are in place, your leadership theory of action, how all that's supposed to work, and we're directly fighting

against this tendency to simply always add more and more activity as our default response when we aren't getting the results we want. Because it may be that we don't need to do more it may just be you know we need to do the same things or even fewer things better. Maybe we need to get some coaching? Maybe we need to change the timing of what we're doing? So, the more we can zoom in on what specifically is working and figure out why, the more we can ask the right questions the more we can fight against that that tendency add more and more activity.

I think we just throw more things at it hoping it will solve the problem absolutely throwing more things at it hoping it solves the problem—that works if you need ballast in a boat, but it doesn't work for almost any other kind of problem. Just adding more is absolutely how we do things in education, but it hardly ever works. We've got to get focused, we've got to get clear. To do that I think is to make sure that we've set four types of goals, then we'll talk about a mapping process in just a moment.

You've seen these four types of goals listed on our questions already—four types I call Purpose, Phase, Progress, and Practice and I've got them in the reverse order here. So, Purpose being the highest level and Practice being the lowest level. And Purpose goals provide motivation and they allow us to assess whether we're achieving the aspirations that we really care about. At the organizational level, a Purpose goal is often expressed as a mission statement, a lot of those official statements that we have at the organizational level are designed to capture our Purpose goals—our aspirations for our students, our motivations for doing this work.

And that's what ultimately matters, if we can't achieve what ultimately matters—like if we can't help our students become successful in life. You know, often we have at the district level or the high school level we have some sort of some sort of aspiration to help students become successful in life whether that's college career and beyond. We want big-picture outcomes, we don't want for our students, as our ultimate aspiration for them, to get good test scores. I mean that's way lower down in the hierarchy here—we want certain things to be the result of our work, we want to make a difference in kids' lives, and we know that's more than data.

So those higher-level Purpose goals or aspirations really have to what we ultimately want, and we have to be clear on those because, if we're not, we risk doing a whole bunch of stuff at these lower levels that ultimately doesn't link up to anything we care about.

The second type of goal here is a Phase goal and we've talked a little bit about milestones, you've identified some milestones that you reached in your school this year, and I think the best way to think about milestones is as accomplishments. So, if we want to help all students graduate from high school ready for college, one of the milestones or the accomplishments that we might have to ensure that we're able

to kind of pull off as adults is we might have to offer a college preparatory curriculum. we might have to offer calculus to all high school students regardless of which high school they go to. So, if we've got a high school that doesn't teach calculus at all, one of our big milestones on the way to achieving our Purpose goal of helping all students become college ready might be to add a calculus program at any schools that don't have it.

So, there are these phases, or these milestones, that we can reach that are not directly an example of the Purpose goal. Like you can't say, "well you know I want to achieve this result for students in their lives and a piece of that is a Phase goal or a milestone." These are not really pieces, these are kind of a means to an end at the organizational level. So, you might add a program, you might hire a staff member, you might undertake a professional development initiative. You know, like if you're doing teacher training on a new curriculum, the purpose of the teacher training is to move things forward instrumentally so that your curriculum can do what it's intended to do. But the purpose of your school is not to do lots of teacher training. We do these things because they are necessary steps—so that is a Phase goal.

The third level is Progress goals and these are the most familiar type. You've probably heard me talk about these on a number of different occasions if you've attended previous webinars. But Progress goals are your good old fashioned traditional SMART goals, your good old-fashioned accountability goals, you have them in your strategic plan, you have them in your accountability or accreditation plan. Regular, old, quantitative data SMART goals I call Progress goals. And those play a monitoring role, they tell us if what we're doing is working and they help us figure out if all of these other types of goals are aligned with one another, because there's a necessary degree of disconnection between milestone goals and those ultimate Purpose goals. If we're going to add a calculus program to help all students be prepared for life in college and career and so on, but we realize that our graduation rate still stinks. If we've added the calculus program and now our graduation rate has gone down, well that can tell us that we've got an alignment problem and that we need to look at the way those pieces are fitting together.

So ultimately Progress goals are often how we measure our progress but by themselves they have two features that I think are really important that I want to point out. One is that Progress goals themselves are not what we ultimately care about.

We might say that the tenth-grade algebra completion rate, you know, the number of kids who have successfully passed algebra by the end of 10th grade or before, we might say that that's one of our important Progress goals, but it's not what we ultimately care about. But it is kind of an indicator, and an early warning, and a measure of something that we do care about which is our graduation rate and our ability to prepare kids for success in life beyond school. So you see some connections here but these are not, you know, Purpose goals don't break down into Phase goals,

which break down into Progress goals, which break down into Practice goals— there are connections but it's not a linear break down.

And then the lowest level here is Practice goals. Practice goals are about what we actually do, they help us move forward. If we're going to implement a curriculum well one of our Practice goals might be that everyone teaches the curriculum every day or every week or whatever the schedule is we need to actually do. So, we're assessing our own action typically at the adult level within schools, but sometimes we're also assessing what our students are doing on an ongoing basis, so that ties to the results that we get and then there are lots and lots and lots of links here.

But when you're setting these types of goals—and this is an exercise that we did early on in the Instructional Leadership Intensive—I realized going through this with people that it's not a process of breaking down your vision into goals, but it's more about figuring out the different things you're doing at each level and linking them up retroactively. So looking back and saying, "okay, we collect this sort of data, and we're doing this, and we're working toward accomplishing implementing this program at the Phase goal level and these four things kind of linked up. So we've got this bigger purpose, we've got this Phase goal or milestone, we've got this progress monitoring data, and then we've got these actions that we're taking at the Practice goal level and those should align, those should link up logically. It's not that they break down one to the next, but they should align. And if you can find something in your school that you realize has not gone well this year, a great question to ask is, how does that link up to the other levels of goals? So, if you think of something that has not gone well this year, or has just kind of stalled, or maybe people have just forgotten about it's kind of gotten swept under the rug in the rush of other things a great question to ask is how linked up is this? Is it linked to what we're doing? Is it linked to what we care about? Is it linked to what we're measuring? You know there's the saying that, what we measure is what we pay attention to and what gets done. You know, when you collect data on something and hold people accountable for it, well that greatly increases the organization's focus on it, and the employees focus on it, and I think that's certainly true. And when we find that that has not been happening maybe we need to look for those links with the various types of goals that are in place.

If you'd like more information on that goal-setting model, we just give it a very brief treatment here because that's not our main focus today, but we have a detailed course called High Performance Goal Setting, that will give you a more full picture on that four level model for goals.



# IMPROVEMENT MAPPING

Okay so let's talk about Improvement Mapping now, and this is going to be a little bit interactive I'm going to be on the hot seat a little bit here, so I need your help because we're going to model improvement mapping using your actual initiatives that you have going on in your school. So going to give a little background and then I'll need some examples from you. This is not like the magic show where you have to volunteer to come up on stage and be sawed in half, but it's the webinar equivalent, so I'll just need an example from some people who are responsive in the chat.

So, if you're fully engaged, if you're at your keyboard, you're not across the room cleaning your whiteboard or something then you can help me out with this. So basically, Improvement Mapping is the process of drawing a diagram that answers the question, "how is this supposed to work?" For example, we had an example in the chat of readers workshop or the reading units of study. Jennifer's school is doing the reading units of study in all classrooms, so that would be an example of something that we could do an improvement map about we could just simply ask how are the reading units of study supposed to work? By the way if you would like me to map your strategy with you or your improvement approach with you say so in the chat just let me know that you're interested and let me know what it is so if it's reading workshops, if it's PBIS, or trauma-informed multi-tiered systems of support, or block scheduling, or whatever your initiative is—your improvement effort is—let me know and we'll run with that. Jennifer says I'd love to map the reading workshops, okay we'll do that as a strategy here in just a moment— we'll map out how that's supposed to work—but I will need your help. I know a little bit about that, but I'll need your help Jennifer, and anyone else who is familiar with the Lucy Calkins Reading Units of Study.

So, in an improvement map, we are going to articulate a theory of action. And a theory of action is a hypothesized set of cause-and-effect relationships that explain how a particular outcome is produced. So if you have purchased the Reading Workshop Units of Study from Lucy Calkins, at Teachers College at Columbia University, there is a theory of action embedded in that that kind of articulates the logic for how that approach is supposed to work. and that theory of action is really critical because when we get into the real world of implementation, we always have to make choices about what to include and what to skip, and what to emphasize, and what to kind of gloss over. And it's really critical that we get clear on what the core elements are so that we don't accidentally leave them out. It's like if you're going over a bridge and you realize that your car is too heavy, and you need to lose some weight from your car before you can drive over that bridge. You don't want to pull out the spark plugs, because the car is simply not going to go without the spark plugs—you might be able to toss the spare tire out, and the jack, and maybe even the backseats if you need to clear some weight, you know, but we always have to do that with any kind

of improvement effort, or curriculum, or initiative. We need to make sure that we're protecting the core of how that is supposed to work. So the theory of action is absolutely the heart of that.

So, when you're doing an improvement map, you'll want to map this out using sticky notes, or using a whiteboard, I'm going to use PowerPoint simply because that's the easiest to share with you on screen. And you want to do that in as linear a fashion as possible and we want to go cause and effect—if we do X then what happens as a result? I'm going to do that in PowerPoint in just a moment. And we want to eliminate any kind of best practice, magical thinking. We get this sense too often in our schools that if we simply implement something that's a best practice, or something that's research-based, or something that John Hattie says has a good effect size, that it will just magically produce results for our kids. And we know that's not true you know we might be able to do something and have it produce good results like I think the whole movement toward teacher proof curriculum that we saw decades ago, you know, "if you just follow this script you will get good results." That sometimes works but it's not what we're talking about here we want to get really clear on how everything is supposed to work.

Okay so Jennifer says we want to map the reading units of study and Jennifer, I'm going to need your help with this. We're going to start by focusing on the inputs and the outcomes, so what is the first thing that we do, and what's the outcome? And this will pop up a little list so this is pretty easy to do in PowerPoint. There are lots of diagram types in PowerPoint but I'm going to use a very linear one, you know, I have not chosen one with lots of arrows that curve, and go around in circles, and split off in different directions—we're going to do something very linear because we're trying to figure out cause and effect and not distract ourselves.

So we want to teach reading units of study, and that might not be the very first thing we do but that's kind of the core that we're going to start with we can build out in both directions from there. And we want to end up this better readers we want our students to become better readers and maybe there's an ultimate outcome that goes beyond that like we might say, "our Purpose goal is to create a lifelong love of reading," you know, there might be some kind of further purpose there, but for the most part, in the interim we're looking at creating better readers. Of course we might have ways that we measure that we don't have to get that specific in our improvement map here we don't have to say you know that the DRA is going to be administered on April 12th, you know, we don't have to get that specific we just want to get the logic of it down. So, Jennifer and anyone else who's familiar with Lucy Calkins' Reading Units of Study help me figure out, just comment in the chat here, what needs to go in between logically here? What steps do I need to add either before or after what I have on here to logically connect teaching the Reading Units of Study to having better readers what's the internal logic of that curriculum?

By the way, you might have heard this called a logic model, I just call it an improvement map, and has kind of an embedded theory of action in it. So we've got the workshop structure okay, and part of the workshop structure is, let's see, I know there are three things that are really important. I know any lessons are important, I know conferring is important, and I'm thinking more writing there, so if conferring is not important we can take that out, but then independent reading. Again, I'm more familiar with the writing workshop, so let me know what you think about that.

So, we've got the mini lesson, knowing the reading bans, knowing students as readers. Okay so Jennifer is defining a lot of the important kind of ingredients, and not all of the ingredients are going to show up in our improvement map as part of the cause-and-effect chain right because they're not actually steps. And what we're going to look for at this stage is the actual steps that need to take place, so we're going to teach the reading units of study using the workshop structure, and that is going to lead to better readers who have a lifelong love of reading. Now below this and I have some subsequent slides on this. We're going to talk about the conditions for success, we're going to talk about unintended consequences, and some other things but before we get to that we want to get to the logic model.

So, I'm going to put this as an if-then statement—if we teach the reading units of study, that is going to cause all students to have a workshop structure for their reading experience, for their reading instruction and that is going to produce better readers. Now my next question is, is there something that happens in between these two logical steps? Is there something that happens in between using that workshop structure and getting better readers? Help me out with that in the chat if you can because I feel like this is probably not quite complete yet, what is it that happens as a consequence of using that workshop structure? What is it? Let's see and Jennifer, I like one thing you already said and I'm going to add this as a consequence here, as an if-then step, so you said, "knowing students as readers," I'm just going to put that as a logical step here because I think that's a big factor that the conferring really helps with. But if we're going to go from the structure to the teacher I feel like we need to get to students as well. So, what could we put in here as a student-focused step?

Jennifer says, "students are more engaged and have more choice," and I think let's see, I might even put choice as a prior step. Choice of strategy, choice of text, and that leads to more engagement. Why is engagement important? Anybody can help me with that one. Why is engagement important? So, when students are more engaged I'm going to guess that part of the logic model is that students spend more total time reading fluently. When students have choice, and are more engaged, they spend more time reading, and when teachers know their students better as readers, we can help them choose appropriate texts, they're able to read fluently. And let's see, we haven't put in really a step about many lessons as far as how those help, but we'll kind of include that under the workshop structure. We could also articulate a

theory of action for strategy instruction—we might do that as a separate improvement map. But I think we're getting into the right ballpark here, this is pretty good.

So, we've got an improvement map now that specifies exactly how this is supposed to work. Now the point of all of that is to get really clear on what the essentials are, and if we are not getting the results we want we can go back to our improvement map and say, "okay, are we doing this or are we breaking this in some way." For example, if we are teaching writing lessons from the curriculum but they're not mini and they take the entire period and as there is never any time during reading instruction for independent reading then we can very quickly realize that if we're not getting results, let's fix that first. If our students are not improving in reading and it turns out that they're not actually reading during reading instruction, well let's fix that because our model requires it. Students have to spend a lot of time reading independently for this model to work—it's just fundamental to the design of that improvement strategy. Make sense? Any questions?

Now there are lots of conditions that we will need to specify, things like criteria to set progress, to measure progress, teacher training, teacher collaboration, good unit planning— there are lots of things that also need to happen for this to work, but what we're specifying here is the core cause-and-effect logic.

Alright now we're going to do PBIS—a number of people wanted us to do PBIS or RTI—so if we adopt an RTI model some things are going to happen and then we're going to connect that to what kind of outcome, what outcome does RTI create? Help me articulate the outcome, because we as adults are going to do some things that are going to have a cause-and-effect relationship that ends up arriving at student learning or some sort of student learning outcome. What does that? Help me articulate that.

So, we might say something like, if you're at the secondary level, we might say increased course pass rate boost rate a failure or you might say that test scores are going to go up and you know it depends a great deal on what grade level and subject area we're talking about. But let's get into the logic of RTI so I'm going to add some steps here in the middle.

So, the way I understand it RTI, Response To Intervention, involves a couple of different things, and because it involves a couple of different things we may end up with more than one map. Let's talk if we could about Tier I interventions, because it's easy to talk about Tier II and say, "oh if only we had a brilliant genius teacher to work extra with the kids who need extra help, then our problem would be solved," but that's not really the foundation of RTI. The foundation of RTI is Tier I, and the way I understand Tier I—you can correct me if your knowledge is more up-to-date than mine—but the way I understand Tier I is that we're providing a supportive instructional environment for all students, so that it is not a high failure, high stakes, you



know, lots of students are not making it kind of environment but it's highly supportive. So, I'm just going to say for now supportive instruction, help me articulate that a little bit better.

So when we have effective Tier I supports in place what happens? Well, one thing that happens is we have fewer students requiring Tier II or III interventions. So when we have more students succeeding with just what we're doing across the board for everyone, we don't need as much intervention, we have fewer students who need that more intensive level of support. Having fewer students in Tier II and III can result in more intensive and effective intervention for students who need it.

I'm going to change our title here because we're really zoomed into talking just about Tier I and I don't want to suggest that this is everything, all the logic, that goes into RTI. Okay, response to intervention, elementary level will see increased engagement, level grading Tier I for all students, supportive instruction, teachers differentiate instruction, providing instructions designed to meet the specific needs of students in the class, fewer students being labeled. Let's see, I'll add or more students needs are being met in the general education setting without special interventions.

So you see what we're doing here is we're really trying to go if-then—if this, then that. If we adopt an RTI model then we will have support of instruction at Tier I with differentiation, students' needs met in general education, and if we do that then—that's the connection from step to step here—fewer students will require Tier II and III interventions, then our more intensive interventions will be more effective for the students who really need them. And if we do that then we will have an increased pass rate, reduced rate of failure, better test scores, whatever. Okay so we're connecting what we do to student outcomes and that is the essence of a theory of action.

Okay let me know what questions you have about that. Now there are a lot of other factors that go into a successful RTI program or into a successful curriculum adoption like Readers Workshop Units of Study and I like to list those separately down below. So, what are the conditions for success? For example, for Reading Units of Study you might say that collaborative planning is a necessary condition, and you might even be able to put some of those conditions into the cause-and-effect diagram. But if they're not if-then logical steps, if you can't figure out where they fit just put them down below as conditions for success.

And then the other thing we want to specify is any unintended consequences. We need to think if we do this really well, if we go all in on that, what else might happen? What might we lose? What price might we pay? Because if we don't anticipate those consequences they're going to catch us off guard, they might manifest as resistance, or we might just need to plan a little bit and get ahead of them.

So if you're interested in improvement mapping, we do have a in depth training called The Improvement Map: Hypothesis-Driven Strategic Planning, that's on demand in your members area if you're a Principal Center Pro Member, but that is all the time we have to spend on improvement mapping, but feel free to send me any questions about that—I would love to chat with you more. I think it's a practice it has a lot of potential for us in the work of improvement.

## BIG INDICATORS

We're going to talk now about Big Indicators. Big Indicators are a great tool for looking back at the end of the year because typically they're always there, we always have them, these quantitative measures that stay the same from year to year, that really measure something that matters. So obviously at the end of the year you're looking at your test score data as soon as you get that back. I don't know what your timeline is for that, some people get it in June, some people don't get it till August—really depends on your state and the tests you give. But you're getting some sort of data back and you want to look at the sources of data that are stable from year to year. What are the things that we can look at that are not changing, that are not kind of initiative specific, but that every year we get some data on whether we're really getting it done for kids? And it may not be that it's the perfect measure, it may not be that it's ultimately what we care about the most, but it's stable, its quantitative, it always means the same thing, and we can really use that to kind of triangulate everything that we are doing, and kind of figure out if we're on track. Because sometimes we can get into all these different changes, all these different projects, and if they're having a negative effect on Big Indicators and we really got to take a look at those.

So, some examples of Big Indicators that you might use in your school you might look at graduation rate, course pass rate, especially at the secondary level. Which courses are students passing especially key courses like Algebra I, English? You might look at your standardized test scores and those could be annual scores at the state testing level, or the ITBS, or they could be interim assessments like MAP. I know a lot of K-5 and K-8 schools use the MAP assessment that gives you a common basis for comparison, and often those tests are not very useful to teachers in terms of the actual curriculum that they teach. They're very disconnected from that curriculum, you don't really get to see the items on that test, but they give you a stable measure from year to year of, "are we moving in the right direction? Are things generally trending upward like this should be?"

Another quantitative source of data you can use, if you have a Numerical Climate Survey that has a rating scale, you can compare those from year to year. And then if you are in a private school setting, you could look at your enrollment, your retention, things like that that impact your staffing and budget and so forth that you know

that should be stable measures from year to year. Often, I hear from private school principals who say, "you know, we've had years of declining enrollment and then we really changed some things and that reversed that trend of declining enrollment," and that's a big indicator for private schools.

So, notice that these indicators are big, and that means that this is not an exact science. You know because it takes time for anything that we do to shift a Big Indicator, like if you want to improve your school's graduation rate that is going to take time. You cannot do that overnight. It's a long feedback cycle, a lot of factors go into that, and that means that we can't do really detailed hypothesis testing, we can't do short-term science on this and say, "well if we do X will that bump up our graduation rate?" Well we don't know, it's going to take time for that to see, you know, for that to bear out.

But what that can encourage us to do, when we're making plans, to plan at a scope that will move a big indicator. because often we can get sucked into this planning process that is very detailed and very thorough and very laborious. I've seen a lot of school improvement plans that have a lot of activities on them then if you order just sit down and say, "well is that going to bump our graduation rate? Is that going to improve the number of kids who pass their courses?" The answer is, pretty obviously, no. If we're doing some small stuff and we're getting ourselves totally preoccupied with that for a year or more, and it's not going to influence a Big Indicator, you know, something big that we care about, we might need to step back and say, "is there something simpler, and more dramatic, and more impactful that we could do? Or might there be a couple of things that we need to do in coordination?" Maybe we need to get our schedule fixed first and then our course offerings, and maybe there's some professional development that has to go along with that? Maybe there are multiple phase goals that really are going to have to be coordinated to impact a Big Indicator.

So, this is mostly a matter of having a stable measure in a matter of choosing improvement activities that are big enough to influence those Big Indicators. I'll give a brief shout out to Mitch Weathers of the Organized Binder we've done some webinars and podcasts with Mitch. He's got a program that's in a lot of high schools, middle schools, upper elementary schools, and even community colleges where they literally just give every kid a binder with different kinds of pages, and it's so simple it's not hard to implement, it's not anything complex that you'd have to read a 500 page book about to understand. Just giving every kid a binder and having teachers use some common routines and classes has had a dramatic impact on the course failure rate at the community college level. Like twice as many kids are passing certain classes because they have this binder and the teachers are following a certain system for using that. So we want to think big when we're looking back and we're saying, "okay what do we need to do in the coming year," I want to encourage you to look a little bigger.

So a reflective question for you, what is a Big Indicator that you use in your school? Is it student SAT scores? Is it enrollment? Is it graduation rate? Is it course pass rate? Is it a certain courses pass rate? but the characteristics there it has to be important not something little, it has to be quantitative so it's not just an impression, and it has to be stable from year to year. you know this is not like write an essay about yourself at the end of the year and ask how you did as a principal. So pay attention to those Big Indicators and just keep in mind they don't allow you to do hypothesis testing, but they do give you a sense of whether you're moving in the right direction.

Sometimes though, it's worth saying, sometimes you might anticipate that a Big Indicator is going to temporarily move in the wrong direction. You know and often we see that when we have new standards, or new assessments we might say, "hey, this is a new more rigorous assignment, our scores are going to go down this year, and then we're going to figure out how to get them up, but we know when we move to this new assessment they're going to go down." So, we don't always have to just blindly expect scores to continue to rise you know we can get ahead of that.

## FROM DATA TO DECISIONS

So, I said earlier that, you know, data is important but I don't think we should be data-driven, because we as professionals have to make judgments. Let's talk now about how we can use data to make decisions. I think that the best way to use data is to answer a specific question that that data source can realistically speak to. We have to apply our professional judgment and the data can inform that judgment but it doesn't make the decision for us. We've got to pose a specific question. And often the most specific question that we can pose of certain types of data like standardized test scores is, "is what we're doing working?" Overall is what we're doing moving things in the right direction?

The data is not going to tell us, "oh well, you should have skipped unit seven and these other materials in your Algebra 2 curriculum," you know, it's not going to be that specific it's only going to tell us the answer to you know a more general question, "like is what we're doing working?" I think if we're too data-driven—this is my takeaway from looking at a lot of the data-driven literature—that if we're too data-driven, we can get into decisions that are bad for students. And I've heard from people who have left schools that were too data-driven, and I'm looking at you, no excuses charter schools, where you know there's a very strong culture of compliance for students. Sometimes data will tell us, yes if you have a strong culture of compliance for students, and you make them sit in straight rows and raise their hands, and chant and you know do all these very compliance-driven things, that that makes test scores go up. And that may be true but I think we also have to ask is this good for students, and is this the best for students? Maybe it is good for students,



I'm not criticizing any particular school model, but I think we've always got to be asking ourselves that question. Are we allowing the data to drive us to do things that are not right for kids? I think we've always got to keep that back of our mind.

Campbell's Law is kind of an official statement and kind of argument about this phenomenon. Donald Campbell was a statistician and sociologist who said, "The more any quantitative social indicator is used for social decision-making, the more subject it will be to corruption pressures and the more apt it will be to distort and corrupt the social processes it is intended to monitor." And of course, Campbell's law is the fancy way of saying this, but we have a more common-sense way of saying this in schools, we call it teaching to the test, right? We know the test is not the purpose of education, we know we can't just teach the test, we have to have good teaching that's meaningful for students.

So Campbell actually speaks to the phenomenon of teaching to the test. He says, "Achievement tests may well be valuable indicators of general school achievement under conditions as normal teaching and good general competence. But when test scores become the goal of the teaching process, they both lose their value as indicators of educational status and distort the educational process in undesirable ways."

A great example of that, I had a friend who is a teacher and she said, "you know, in my school we really had a lot of pressure to get the test scores up, so we had a trainer come in and give a workshop on how to identify the bubble kids," and I said, "what are the bubble kids, Leslie? I've never heard of bubble kids," and she said, "well it's the kids who, you know, their test scores show there they're right on the cusp of passing the test. So what we do is spend a lot of extra time helping the bubble kids so that they pass, and you don't worry as much about the kids who have no chance of passing, and you don't worry as much about the kids who are going to pass no matter what; you just focus on the bubble kids." I thought, "okay, well that probably gets your scores up, but like that feels kind of wrong to me," and she said, "yeah that felt kind of wrong to me too. Like, why don't we care about all of our kids whether or not they have a realistic shot at passing the test?"

So this is a prime example of Campbell's law, when test scores become the goal they lose their value as indicators of educational status, so any school that is working on the bubble kids is doing different things than a school that's just trying to help everyone improve so you know they're getting kind of a false boost out of that bubble kid approach and it's of course distorting the educational process.

Alright and Rocio in the chat says, "an A+ does not tell you whether a student has empathy, creativity, or great problem-solving skills." Fabulous, thanks very much for that comment. And of course, this has uglier manifestations as well, you know, like we saw a couple years ago in Atlanta with the cheating scandal. People are actually

erasing students answers on standardized test scores, some of them went to jail, you know, obviously this has it's more blatant manifestations that happen more rarely.

But, you know, on an ongoing basis, I think that the bigger risk is that our purpose goals get undermined, right? When we change the goal of education from what we really care about you know, students being successful in life, students being lifelong readers, students having empathy, and creativity, and problem solving skills, and we say, "no our goal, as a district, is to produce test scores." If that happens then we've fallen off track. So we've really got to look at that alignment between our goals, and not let those Progress goals become Purpose goals.

So I want to ask you, when specifically have you seen that happen? When have you seen Campbell's Law swoop in and seen maybe something that just should have been a source of data actually become the purpose of education as it was being implemented in an organization? Have you seen that happen and what does that look like?

## ASSESSING FIDELITY OF IMPLEMENTATION

I'm going to go ahead and wrap things up here with Fidelity of Implementation. So, as we look back on our progress and as we examine our success our track record for the year, one of the things we have to look back on is for our Phase goals our milestone goals did we implement what we said we're going to implement with fidelity?

So, the two levels of the goal-setting questions that we looked at Practice goals and Phase goals, when we're looking back at Fidelity of Implementation, we want to look at did we do what we intended to do and did we get done what we intended to get done?

You know, if we said we are going to use exit tickets in every class—at the end of every period—we're going to use exit tickets, well did we actually do that? On a day to day basis, did we do that? That would be a Practice goal and in the big picture milestone kind of implementation, if we said we're going to become a Reading Units of Study school and implement that curriculum we do that, did that actually happen? So we can look at those two questions to look back.

So a way that you might get more specific about that to assess Fidelity of Implementation with any particular initiative is you might just make yourself a plot, you know, get a long sheet of paper or sheet of poster paper on the wall, or use a whiteboard and say, on a scale from 0% to 100% where would I put each staff member with implementing this initiative. If we are supposed to be a Reading Units of Study school now, and every teacher is supposed to be teaching reading exclusively through this

model, everybody's doing it every day, to what extent is that the reality? Do people who are over here in like the single digits? Do we have people who are truly at 100%? Do we have a cluster of people in the middle? Where are we? and then once you see those patterns—once you see those clusters—you have a very clear sense of what you need to do, professional development wise, to move things forward.

And I think that individual breakdown looking at individual teachers and saying, "where are each of my staff members on this continuum," can help us avoid making bad investments in professional development. If I have some people who are way over here, but it turns out that that's just like my one person at every grade level who is about to retire, I might not need to do whole staff professional development to improve Fidelity of Implementation. If everybody else is way over here, we can do some whole staff professional development that's going to move them from lower to higher and really focus on the high end and then do something smaller and more targeted for that small group that's way over on the low end.

So if you're looking back on a particular initiative, do that plot where are we on a scale of 0 to 100%, person-by-person, just put a dot for each person— maybe put their initials by it—and say where is that person, and then what are our clusters? The second question you might want to look at to assess Fidelity of Implementation is, what does the model look like in ideal form? I know for Reading Units of Study there are model schools and model classrooms in New York City that you can go to and see what reading workshop looks like the way Lucy Calkins' teaches it. So if you are following those units of study in the book, and you want to see, ok what does this look like with real kids? Because it sounds great, but it sounds really hard, what's it supposed to look like? You can actually go and see.

And I'm going to ask you in just a moment where you would go and see the model. And then one more tool for assessing Fidelity of Implementation that I want to give you is the level of awareness— what is our level of awareness when it comes to this particular skill, or curriculum, or instructional strategy, or initiative? So we'll come back to the levels of awareness in just a second but I want to encourage you to look to models, because often models are our initial inspiration. They are what prompt us to get going and say, hey we can do this we can get great results, like Stevenson High School in Lincolnshire Illinois, was the model school for professional learning communities and still is. You know, people go to Stevenson High School in Illinois and say, hey I want to see your PLC's. And they have trainings that they do to educate the world, you know, there are books published, there are conferences put on sharing that model.

And if you've heard of PLC's, if you know that PLC's are a thing, but you've never actually seen that model it's easy to think, "oh yeah, we're doing fine we're doing PLC's," but I want to encourage you to go to the source and actually look at those models and say, "hey how do we stack up? Where do we stand in terms of fidelity to

that model?"

So think about your biggest goals for your school, maybe a particular model, maybe it's a curriculum, maybe it's an approach like RTI, what are the models that you're following? Where do they exist in the real world, and how can you take a look at them and kind of compare yourself? So let me know in the chat what are some models that you're looking at, is there a school in your district for example we're doing a webinar series on video coaching in the Cypress Fairbanks School District, there's one school that is the model and then that model is being emulated in every other school in that district which is near Houston, so you probably got an email for me about that today. That would be a great example of that.

And then the last tool here is the level of awareness scale. So, in your school if you were doing something new this year did your staff go from becoming not aware of it to becoming aware? Which we would call Domain-Aware, like we know that conferring is a thing, we know that project-based learning, is a thing, is that the level we're at? Or are we moving more into implementation and say, "we're doing this. We know we are all doing X, we're all doing mini lessons as part of our reading curriculum," so we're Performance-Aware, that'd be the second level, "we know we're doing some things and kind of we can tell you what we're doing but then the third level is Impact-Awareness. Do we know how well it's working? Can I say, "I did my mini lesson today and I could see that this student, this student, and this student really took something away from it?" That is the third level of awareness and then beyond that we can become Skill-Aware, and when we're Skill-Aware we actually know how good we are and what we need to do to improve.

I did not do that topic justice in just a moment here so if you're interested in that that scale of awareness I want to refer you to our recent training, Raising the Quality of Your Instructional Feedback, which is in our Pro Member area and you can watch the whole thing and get more information on that awareness model. But what I want to encourage you to do is think, not just in terms of what did we do like what initiatives did we quote-unquote do this year, but where do they stand in terms of Fidelity of Implementation? Where is our staff on that spectrum of implementation? What is the model that we're following and how do we stack up to that?

So I think we are well out of time, thank you so much for being here and thinking through some of these issues with me, I would love to know how you're applying some of these kind of analysis tools, this is a very open-ended process so please let me know what you're thinking about. I'd love for you to shoot me an email, let me know how this is influencing your thinking and what you're going to do with this. And if you're interested in any of the trainings that we mentioned for additional information on any of these topics, that's at [members.principalcenter.com](https://members.principalcenter.com) and if you are not a Pro Member you can become a Pro Member for zero additional cost today, if you registered for this webinar by itself, [principalcenter.com/upgrade](https://principalcenter.com/upgrade) will let you



do that.

And your school is a model, no doubt, for other things that other schools and other principals would like to implement as well. So, I hope these are useful tools we will get the recording and the slides and the executive summary out later today so stay tuned for that thank you so much for being here. So, you've got the workbook, I'm going to put the link to the workbook in as well, if you didn't get a chance to print that I think it's [principalcenter.com/plans-workbook](http://principalcenter.com/plans-workbook) that might help you as you go forth and apply. Thank you everyone for being here, and have a great day!