### Introduction

This presentation will guide you through the process of developing instructional priorities. It will lay out the steps to effectively set priorities, alert you to common pitfalls faced by districts, and provide templates to fill in as you go.

While the first half of the guide will help in developing the priorities (Step 2: Set Instructional Priorities), the second half will include extra information on how to make a plan for implementing each priority (Step 3: Pay for Priorities and Step 4: Implement Plan).

## What will you get out of this activity?

1. An assessment of where your district is in developing actionable priorities
2. Support for bringing your leadership through a process of developing priorities
3. Next steps for how to invest in and implement the top priorities

## When should you do this activity?

Step 2: Set Instructional Priorities
Use this guide to initiate the developing priorities process

## Approximately how long may it take to complete?

- ~30 minutes for project champion to review materials and make assessment of district's status
- 1-2 weeks if the district needs to clarify its priorities
- 3-5 months if the district needs to undergo a whole strategic planning process

## Who should be involved?

- **project champion** to make initial assessment of district's progress and facilitate additional actions
- **The district's senior leadership team** to make decisions about which priorities your district should pursue
- **Additional district personnel** including academic, financial, and school-based leaders to support the identification of key priorities

## Is technical assistance support necessary?

No, but additional support would be helpful if the district undertakes a strategic planning process

## Tips & Tricks

- The information in this guide can be used by district staff to learn about how to develop instructional priorities. The slides in this guide can also be used to make a presentation to lead the district's senior leadership team through the meeting to set instructional priorities
Instructional Priorities Planner

Guide to the process of developing and implementing instructional priorities in a district. Includes materials to use with the district's senior leadership team to set priorities that address district success goals.
Table of Contents

1. Before You Begin

2. Introduction to Priorities

3. 7 Steps to Priorities
   Part I: Develop Priorities

4. 7 Steps to Priorities
   Part II: Implement Priorities
Before You Begin

Assess District’s Current Status

How far along is your district in creating instructional priorities?

Priorities Fully Developed

- Our district has a strategic plan that has been translated into implementable instructional priorities
  - Our district has recently conducted a comprehensive strategic planning process
  - That plan has been translated into clear instructional priorities to implement
  - The community knows about and supports these instructional priorities

Development of Priorities Required

- We have a strategic plan but no clear priorities to implement
  - If our district has done a strategic planning process, we have not translated that plan into discrete priorities
  - We have not communicated our priorities to the community

- We have not yet formally defined our priorities or conducted a strategic planning process
  - Our district does not have a set of priorities or specific initiatives that it is driving towards
Before You Begin

Assess District’s Current Status

Priorities Fully Developed

Our district has a strategic plan that has been translated into implementable instructional priorities

Development of Priorities Required

We have a strategic plan but no clear priorities to implement

We have not yet formally defined our priorities or conducted a strategic planning process

For each scenario, what should your district do next?

Quickly review the following presentation to confirm that the priorities in your district’s strategic plan are specific, compelling, and not too many.

If not, go through a process to clarify your priorities.

Review the following presentation to support the translation of your strategic plan into discrete priorities that are specific, compelling, and not too many.

Often, districts find that their priorities require further clarification.

Go through the steps outlined in this presentation to develop specific instructional priorities based on district student outcome goals.

Consider conducting a full strategic planning process in your district.
Before You Begin

Assess District’s Current Status

For each scenario, how should your district engage stakeholders as you develop priorities?

**Priorities Fully Developed**
- Our district has a strategic plan that has been translated into implementable instructional priorities
- Confirm awareness of and support for the district’s priorities
- Continue to reinforce existing priorities through ongoing community engagement

**Development of Priorities Required**
- We have a strategic plan but no clear priorities to implement
- Work with key stakeholders to foster clarity and agreement around the priorities
- Build awareness of and support for the district’s priorities
- Communicate priorities to the broader community

- We have not yet formally defined our priorities or conducted a strategic planning process
- Utilize the Smarter School Spending communication resources to engage stakeholders in the process
Table of Contents

1. Before You Begin

2. Introduction to Priorities

3. 7 Steps to Priorities
   Part I: Develop Priorities

4. 7 Steps to Priorities
   Part II: Implement Priorities
Introduction to Priorities

What are Instructional Priorities?

Instructional Priority

A program, school model, or other instructional initiative the district will commit to implementing in order to achieve student outcome goals.

Why are instructional priorities important?

- Instructional priorities clearly identify the link between the actions to be taken and our desired student outcome goals.
- Estimate the costs of the investments needed for our instructional priorities so we can see how much we need in cost savings to pay for those priorities.
- If the board and other stakeholders agree that our students will greatly benefit from instructional priorities, they will be more likely to agree with the cost savings to fund those priorities.

What makes for effective instructional priorities?

1. **Limited**: We should select only a few priorities so that the district can focus time and energy towards implementing them effectively.
2. **Specific**: The priorities should be specific and concrete enough to be actionable for the district.
3. **Outcomes-Driven**: The priorities should be connected to the district’s student outcome goals and should be efforts that will make major progress towards those goals.

Agreement from District Leaders & Stakeholders:

If we do not have specific instructional priorities that our stakeholders strongly believe are essential, it is not worth trying to find cost savings to pay for them.
Instructional priorities are developed by identifying the **district's goals** for student achievement, determining which **levers for success** will impact progress towards those goals, selecting **instructional priorities** to invest in to move those levers, and creating a **plan to implement** those priorities.

**Key Phases:**

**District Goals**
- District targets for improving student success outcomes
  - Example: “Reading by 3rd Grade”
  - 90% of the district’s 3rd graders will be proficient in reading by 2016

**Levers for Success**
- Strategies your district can use to achieve its goals
  - Example: Quality of literacy instructional materials and resources

**Instructional Priorities**
- Specific instructional initiatives your district will invest in to impact the lever
  - Example: Add formative assessments into curriculum

**Plan to Implement**
- Detailed plan for how to implement the instructional priority and monitor progress
  - Example: Purchase assessment systems, train instructors to use system, track results
Table of Contents

1. Before You Begin

2. Introduction to Priorities

3. 7 Steps to Priorities
   *Part I: Develop Priorities*

4. 7 Steps to Priorities
   *Part II: Implement Priorities*
7 Steps to Priorities

7 Steps to Implementing Instructional Priorities

- **Step 1. Plan and Prepare**
  - Define the goal: What student achievement goals does your district plan to accomplish?

- **Step 2. Set Instructional Priorities**
  - Map the levers: Which levers are most important and within your power to change?
  - Prioritize levers: Which levers are most important for attention in the near term?
  - Set Priorities: What initiative will allow your district to make progress on the levers chosen?

- **Step 3. Pay for Priorities**
  - Build a plan: How can your district set a detailed plan with costs, targets and milestones to implement the initiatives?

- **Step 4. Implement Plan**
  - Execute plan: How can your district make progress towards accomplishing the plan put in place?

- **Step 5. Ensure Sustainability**
  - Monitor progress: How does your district plan to monitor progress of the initiative against targets and intervene when necessary?
7 Steps to Priorities
Define the Goal: Make goals that are SMARTER

As districts identify goals for student achievement, they should all meet the SMARTER criteria:

- **S**pecific: The goal is precise about the outcome or result that your district wishes to achieve.
- **M**easurable: The goal can be measured and quantified.
- **A**chievable: The goal is feasible given your district’s current environment.
- **R**elevant: The goal is focused on the results or outcomes that matter most to students.
- **T**ime-bound: The goal should identify a time period within which the goal is to be achieved and specific milestones for incremental progress.
- **E**ngaging: The goal reaches for ambitious, yet realistic, improvement in student achievement and organizational performance.
- **R**esourced: Your district has the capacity to achieve its goals and will be able to align resources accordingly.
In order to determine which instructional priorities can drive towards the goal, it is important to figure out what the district can do to impact that goal.

**Sample “Every-Day” Mapping of Levers:**

- **Buy fewer items**
  - Buy less food
  - Buy less clothing
  - Buy less entertainment
  - Buy less travel

- **Change the mix of items purchased**
  - Buy lower-quality items
  - Buy items at discount/on sale
  - Share costs of items (e.g., split rent with roommate, car pool)
  - Purchase substitutes (e.g., movie rentals instead of purchases)

*Which would you choose, and why?*
7 Steps to Priorities

Map the Levers: Mapping levers for your district’s goal

Districts can map levers from a goal by identifying the specific areas and sub-areas within that goal then identifying the levers that would have the most impact when pulled.

**Steps**

- Define the goal
- Map the levers
- Prioritize levers
- Set Priorities
- Build a plan
- Execute plan
- Monitor progress

**Goal**

- Effective literacy instruction in K-3
- Beyond the school day (K-3)

**Area**

- Before Kindergarten
- Literacy in the home
- Effective literacy instruction in K-3
- Beyond the school day (K-3)

**Sub-area**

- Pre-K
- Instructional quality
- Instructional materials
- Extended learning
- Community and family
- Summer

**Lever: What Your District Can Change**

- Effectiveness of pre-K
- Alignment of Pre-K to K-2
- Attendance in Pre-K
- Time in Pre-K
- Family understanding of literacy
- Literacy resources in the home
- Family commitment to literacy
- Quality and consistency of literacy curriculum
- Quality of literacy teachers
- Use of data to inform instruction
- Feedback and improvement of practice
- Amount of instructional time for literacy
- Literacy integrated across all subjects
- Class size in K-3 literacy instruction
- Attendance in K-3 literacy
- Quality of materials and resources
- Availability of materials and resources
- Availability of after school programs
- Quality of after school programs
- Consistency of after school programs
- Quality and availability of family programs
- Quality and availability of community programs
- Quality and availability of library programs
- Quality and availability of summer school
- Quality and availability of college programs

“Reading by 3rd Grade”
90% of the district’s 3rd graders will be proficient in reading by 2016
7 Steps to Priorities

Prioritize Levers: Identify the levers with the most impact on the district’s goal

Steps

- Define the goal
- Map the levers
- Prioritize levers
- Set Priorities
- Build a plan
- Execute plan
- Monitor progress

How can a district determine which levers to focus on?

Key Questions

- Do studies consistently show this lever has strong impact on students?
- Does your district have supports in place to ensure efforts succeed?
- Does your district have specific actions it can take (e.g., monitor number of IEP filings) for the lever, as opposed to general hopes (e.g., improve Special Ed)?
- Does the lever take advantage of your district’s current strengths to minimize new investments?
7 Steps to Priorities

Prioritize Levers: Select the levers for focus

With limited resources, your district will need to select only a few levers that will be the most important and most effective in achieving the district's goal.

**Steps**

- Define the goal
- Map the levers
- Prioritize levers
- Set Priorities
- Build a plan
- Execute plan
- Monitor progress

**Goal**

Effective literacy instruction in K-3

**Area**

Before Kindergarten

- Literacy in the home

**Sub-area**

- Pre-K

**Lever: What Your District Can Change**

- Effectiveness of pre-K
- Alignment of Pre-K to K-2
- Attendance in Pre-K
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- Quality of materials and resources
- Availability of materials and resources
- Availability of after school programs
- Quality of after school programs
- Consistency of after school programs
- Quality and availability of family programs
- Quality and availability of community programs
- Quality and availability of library programs
- Quality and availability of summer school
- Quality and availability of college programs

- "Reading by 3rd Grade" - 90% of the district’s 3rd graders will be proficient in reading by 2016

- Before Kindergarten

- Beyond the school day (K-3)

- Community and family

- Summer
With limited resources, your district will need to select only a few levers that will be the most important and most effective in achieving the district’s goal.
7 Steps to Priorities

Set Priorities: Determine where to invest to achieve the district’s goals

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Steps

1. Defining the goal
2. Mapping the levers
3. Prioritizing levers
4. Setting priorities
5. Building a plan
6. Executing the plan
7. Monitoring progress

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Effective Instructional Priorities are...

1. **Critical**: They address an important need within the school that stakeholders agree upon.
2. **Compelling**: Your district can make a strong case for why the instructional priority is important and connected to the district’s overall goal.
3. **Crystal Clear**: The priorities and the implications of the investments should be easy to understand by the district and your district should be able to set targets to measure the impact of the priority.

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Common Pitfalls

1. **Too Many**: Districts often select too many priorities which inhibits the ability to focus on a few priorities and implement them well. Districts have found that ~3-4 priorities is the best amount.
2. **Not Specific**: The priorities should be specific and concrete enough to be actionable for the district.
3. **Not Enough Impact**: Connect priorities to the district’s student outcome goals and ensure they will make major progress towards those goals. Initiatives in only one school for example would not make the necessary impact.

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Your district will set instructional priorities that you will support by investing in specific programs or efforts. This is a crucial step and it is important that districts identify clear and specific priorities.
# 7 Steps to Priorities: Worksheet

**Fill in your district goals, levers, and instructional priorities**

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Goal 1:</th>
<th>Goal 2:</th>
<th>Goal 3:</th>
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<tbody>
<tr>
<td><img src="#" alt="Levers for Success" /></td>
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**Checklist: Are your priorities...**

- Critical?
- Compelling?
- Crystal Clear?
- Limited to 1-2?
- Specific?
- Linked to student achievement?
Review and Finalize Instructional Priorities

At this point, your district should have determined a select number of instructional priorities that it will invest in to drive student achievement.

Before you continue, ensure that the instructional priorities...

• Meet all the criteria of effective priorities
• Have agreement and support from both internal and external stakeholders

Next, the guide will discuss how your district can build a plan to implement the priorities, execute the plan, and monitor progress.
Table of Contents

1. Before You Begin

2. Introduction to Priorities

3. 7 Steps to Priorities
   Part I: Develop Priorities

4. 7 Steps to Priorities
   Part II: Implement Priorities
## 7 Steps to Priorities

**Build a Plan, Execute Plan, and Monitor Progress**

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Steps</th>
<th>Activity</th>
<th>Sample answer</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td><strong>1 Define</strong> the priority at a high level (what you want to change and how you will change it, in a sentence)</td>
<td>• Ensure student achievement data is shaping and improving instruction via use of formative assessments and the importing of formative assessment data into district’s system</td>
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<td></td>
<td><strong>2 Set 3-5 outcomes</strong> that articulate what success looks like for this priority</td>
<td>By 1/1/2018,...</td>
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<td></td>
<td><em>Check-Point: Does your district have a plan to measure these outcomes?</em></td>
<td>• 100% of K-3 ELA classes will administer 3 or more standards-aligned formative assessments per year to diagnose student progress</td>
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<td>• The results of these assessments will be available in the district’s system no more than 20 days after testing</td>
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<td>• 100% of the district’s teachers will be logging into this system weekly to monitor progress</td>
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<td></td>
<td><strong>3 Using these goals, break the priority into 3-5 manageable components</strong></td>
<td>To achieve success, the district must...</td>
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<td>• Choose/create, schedule, and administer the standards-aligned assessments</td>
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<td>• Ensure assessment data enters the district’s system</td>
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<td>• Ensure teachers know how (and why) to use system</td>
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<td></td>
<td>• Ensure principals know how (and why) to use the system</td>
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<td><strong>4 Begin backwards planning</strong> <em>(see next page)</em></td>
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<td></td>
<td><strong>5 Step back and assess obstacles and next steps</strong> <em>(see next page)</em></td>
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</table>
# 7 Steps to Priorities

**Build a Plan, Execute Plan, and Monitor Progress:** Divide the plan into manageable sections with clear activities

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Steps</th>
<th>Activity</th>
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<tbody>
<tr>
<td>Define the goal</td>
<td>Decide on a clear <em>end-state</em></td>
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<tr>
<td>Map the levers</td>
<td>Plan with the end in mind: what <em>actions</em> will the district need to accomplish and by when - to reach this target?</td>
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<td>Prioritize levers</td>
<td>Considering these actions, <em>what tools / deliverables</em> will the district need to accomplish them? When will we need them? Who is responsible for each?</td>
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<tr>
<td>Set Priorities</td>
<td>Schedule <em>check-ins:</em> A) How often does the leadership of this project need to meet with senior leadership? B) What will they discuss at the check ins?</td>
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<td>Build a plan</td>
<td>Identify key <em>stakeholders:</em> A) Who will monitor progress to ensure we are on track? B) Who needs to be brought in early for consultation?</td>
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<td>Execute plan</td>
<td>Step back: What will be the biggest “bottleneck” in the path towards this target? Are there steps the district can take to address this bottleneck in advance?</td>
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<td>Monitor progress</td>
<td>Think <em>next steps:</em> What decisions or signoff do we need in order to kick off ASAP?</td>
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*For each component of an instructional priority...*

**Next Step**

Estimate the costs of each priority to determine the whole financial need

**Cost Projection Tool**
The overall initiative is ...

- ...

The major accomplishments needed to do that are ...

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<th>Date</th>
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... which will require the following main pieces of work

A ...
B ...
C ...
D ...
E ...
Set up a plan for each instructional priority (part 2)

For each component of a priority...

- Desired end state, including date

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Date</th>
<th>4B Actions</th>
<th>4C Deliverables</th>
<th>4D Check-ins</th>
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### 5A Stakeholders – who else needs to be engaged?

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<th>Group</th>
<th>Role</th>
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### 5B Critical path/bottleneck

<table>
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<th>3 most critical</th>
<th>How to address</th>
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### 5C Getting started

<table>
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<th>Key decisions</th>
<th>Other items</th>
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