

Creating the Action Plan

Prioritizing District Initiatives for Implementation; Creating an Action Plan That Supports Monitoring and Reporting

What is an Action Plan? An action plan is an annual implementation plan for the multi-year district plan. Action plan components include implementation benchmarks and the resources, both staff and financial, needed to support the action plan’s successful implementation. The Massachusetts Planning and Implementation Framework defines two types of implementation benchmarks: process benchmarks, which define who will do what and when, and early evidence of change benchmarks, which define changes you should begin to see if the plan is having its desired impact during implementation.

Why This Step is Important: Once the multi-year district plan is in place, creating an action plan is a natural next step in the planning process. At this stage, the district reviews the work identified in the multi-year plan and prioritizes the work to be conducted in the current year. The planning team then conducts a deeper level of planning for those initiatives, which results in both a more comprehensive understanding of the work to be done and a plan that the district can use to guide, monitor, and report on its work over the course of the year. Some districts find it particularly useful to conduct action planning prior to the start of a new school year.

It is helpful to conduct action planning in small teams that are focused on specific strategic objectives/initiatives, and for these teams to continue to “own” the action plan for their objective during both development and implementation. The *Planning for Success* guide, “Creating the Action Planning Team,” is provided as a resource to assist districts in establishing action plan team membership.

The Action Planning Process: For many districts, the creation and use of an annual action plan marks a change in practice. Implementing an action plan provides the opportunity for district leadership teams to work together in new ways as they monitor and report on the plan. As a result, action plans have the potential to positively affect district culture and practice.

It is helpful to unearth and identify such opportunities early in the action planning process, before the planning team begins to create the action plan. A SWOT Analysis, as described in the *Planning for Success* guide, “Analyzing District Planning Practices and Culture,” can be useful in surfacing some of the issues that might be raised or addressed during the action planning process. The process below describes an approach to setting the stage for and conducting action planning.

1. *Introduce the action plan model and benchmarks:* Set the stage for action planning with the planning team by examining the role of the action plan and its relationship to the district plan. Examine implementation benchmarks and, if the district chooses to set early evidence of change benchmarks, brainstorm what such benchmarks might look

like. For example, select two or three initiatives from the district plan. Organize into small groups to draft early evidence of change examples for assigned initiatives. Reconvene as a whole group, review small group examples, and discuss possible revisions to develop early evidence benchmarks that will be most useful. The time required for this session is approximately 1 hour.

2. *Conduct action planning workshops:* Prior to conducting action planning workshops, ensure that the district has prioritized and selected initiatives to be action planned for implementation that year. The superintendent and planning team should discuss how to structure smaller action plan teams that are focused on an assigned strategic objective/initiative. Establish action plan team membership.

Once initiatives are identified and action plan teams are established, organize by action plan team and begin the action planning workshop. Use the Action Plan Template below, if desired, to document the action planning work of each team. It is most helpful if the recorder of each group has access to a laptop and can enter benchmarks into the template online. Allow approximately 1 to 1.5 hours for the initial action planning workshop.

Although the team will likely still be in the process of creating the action plan at that point, it is helpful to pause and use the *Planning for Success* Action Plan Review Protocol to conduct a modified, initial review of the developing action plan. Action plan teams will benefit from such early feedback from their colleagues during plan development. This protocol is provided in the *Planning for Success* guide, “Reviewing the Draft Action Plan for Quality.”

Time Required: Action plan creation is an iterative process; the plan will benefit from feedback gathered with the Action Plan Review Protocol, which may be conducted more than once. The initial launch and drafting of action plans described above requires approximately 2 hours to complete, prior to initial action plan review.

Note to Facilitators: As noted earlier, action planning offers the opportunity to positively affect both practice and culture. It is useful to draw upon existing district team norms—or to develop new norms—before engaging in the action planning work. In addition, it is helpful if the superintendent can set expectations for the work, encouraging open and honest dialogue.

It is not unusual for action planning to raise questions or reveal issues for consideration in the district plan itself. For example, during action planning, teams may realize that what was originally conceived of as one strategic objective is actually two, or that the plan contains more strategic objectives than is realistic for the time period. The superintendent should reinforce that planning teams have permission to address such issues as they arise and to revise the district plan, if necessary. Doing so will improve the quality of both the district and the action plans.

Text for Facilitator Presentation Slides: Some suggested text for presentation slides for creating an action plan is included below.

Slide 1: Action Plan Elements

- Implementation benchmarks
 - Process benchmarks: what, when, who
 - Early evidence of change benchmarks: measuring impact during implementation
- Resources

Slide 2: Implementation Benchmarks

- Process
 - What will be done, when, and by whom
 - *Are we on track to accomplish what we want to accomplish? Is the work getting done?*
- Early evidence of change
 - Changes in practice, attitude, or behavior you should begin to see if the initiative is having its desired impact
 - *If desired improvement is occurring, what would you see and hear, at what point, for whom and how many?*
 - *How will you monitor the benchmark? How will you know if the benchmark has been met?*

Slide 3: Early Evidence of Change Brainstorming

- Organize into [X] small groups
- Identify a facilitator and recorder
- If desired improvement is occurring, what would you see and hear—at what point, for whom, and how many—for these initiatives:
 - [select and list initiatives from the district plan]

Slide 4: Early Evidence Group Share

- What benchmark did your group develop?
- Why does the group believe this is an effective measure for this initiative?
- What was the group's experience of the process for creating this benchmark?

Slide 5: Action Planning Workshops

- Organize into [X] action plan teams, by strategic objective/initiative
 - Teams will design and “own” action plan
- Identify the team leader, recorder, timekeeper
- What are the key actions/steps we need to take to implement this initiative?
 - Process benchmarks: who is going to ensure these actions are taken? When?
- How will you know if this initiative is having its desired impact?
 - Early evidence of change benchmark: changes practice, attitude, behavior

Action Plan Template

Setting Benchmarks to Monitor Progress and Impact During Implementation

Strategic Initiative/Objective: _____

Monitoring Progress

Process Benchmarks: What will be done, when, and by whom

| Process Benchmark | Person Responsible | Date | Status |
|--|--------------------|----------------|------------|
| <i>Example: Identify common district-wide reading strategies</i> | <i>M. Edwards</i> | <i>10/1/14</i> | <i>Met</i> |
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Measuring Impact

Early Evidence of Change: Changes in practice, attitude, or behavior you should begin to see if the initiative is having its desired impact

| Early Evidence of Change Benchmark | Person Responsible | Date | Status |
|---|--------------------|---------------|--------|
| <i>Example: 75% of all teacher observations conducted in each school cite evidence of reading strategy implementation</i> | <i>S. Harris</i> | <i>2/1/15</i> | |
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Resources Supporting Implementation

The staff and financial resources allocated to support this initiative

| Resources |
|--|
| <i>Example: Title IIA funds used to provide professional development, K-12</i> |
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