# ACADEMIC ACCELERATION

This tool is part of the *EdResearch Act on Evidence Toolkit* which was created by EdResearch for Action[1] in partnership with DeliverEd[2] to support education leaders to assess the degree to which their existing programs are aligned with the relevant evidence-base and determine a pathway towards improving alignment and student success. While the toolkit is designed primarily for school and district leaders (e.g., Superintendents, Assistant Superintendents, Chief Academic Officers, and Principals), leaders at other levels of K-12 education (e.g., SEA leaders, policy-makers, advocacy groups, etc.) may find this tool helpful to understand the most critical, effective, evidence-based strategies to accelerate academic achievement.

This tool takes approximately 2 hours to complete. Remember very few (if any!) programs will meet all of the expectations for "strong alignment" so don't be discouraged - strive to reflect as honestly as possible to best understand and plan for impactful next steps.

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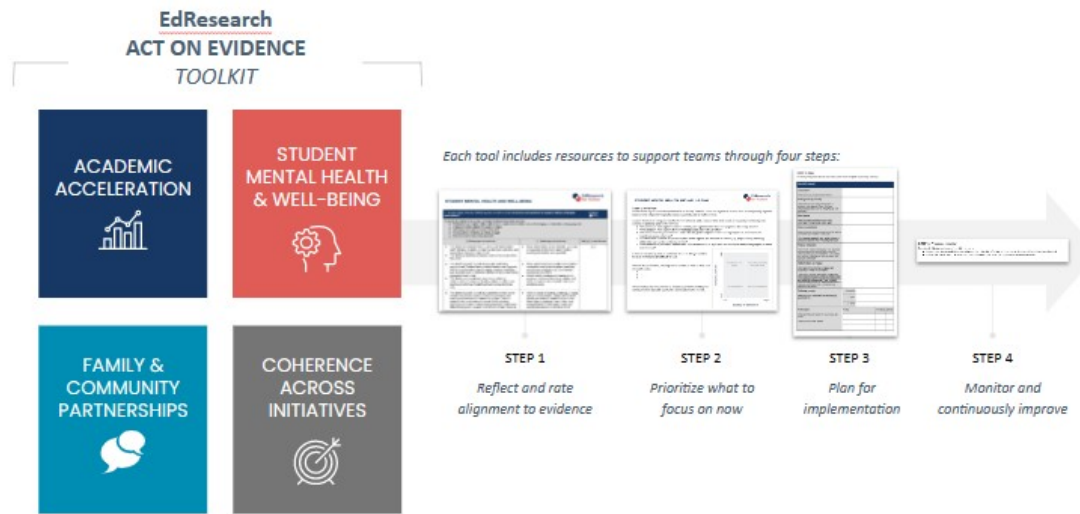
[1] EdResearch for Action is a joint initiative of Results for America and the Annenberg Institute at Brown University. EdResearch produces research briefs, runs practitioner networks, and engages relevant media to present and implement evidence-based recommendations for navigating pandemic response and recovery, and other ongoing challenges facing schools.

[2] DeliverEd is an organization that helps education leaders deliver results for students at scale. DeliverEd supports results-focused strategic planning and implementation/progress monitoring.

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STEP 1: Reflect and rate alignment to evidence

Use the rubric below to capture reflection ratings and rationales based on the team's assessment of your current alignment to evidence:

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Strategy (*click to be taken to rubric*)	Rating	Rationale
1. Tier 1 academic supports	‚	
2. Instructional materials and curriculum-based professional learning		
3. Instructional coaching		
4. Student engagement and attendance		
5. Intensive academic interventions		
6. Rigorous tutoring program (if applicable)		
7. Quality summer learning programs (if applicable)		

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1. Has the district supported schools to implement **Tier 1 support for all students?**[3]		Strategy: ▮▯▯▯▯▯▯
To arrive at a rating for this area, consider evidence from these sources: ● Walkthrough data ● MTSS data (disaggregated by student subgroup) ● District programming documents and guidance related to Tier 1 supports ● School schedules (including PLC and planning time) ● Family engagement plans/tools		
(4) Strong alignment looks like…	*(1) Weak alignment looks like…*	*Rating (4-1) and rationale*
● The district provides scheduling guidance to schools for recommended minutes for Tier I instruction by grade level and content area, and ways to minimize disruptions to instructional time (e.g., announcements, fire drills). ● The district ensures schools have valid systems to track and re-engage students, using high-quality formative assessments to proactively identify students in need of additional support and provide just-in-time, culturally responsive acceleration opportunities.	● Students disproportionately receive Tier 2-3 supports, suggesting Tier 1 instruction doesn't meet most needs. Additional supports prioritize remediation over acceleration, limiting use of grade-level content. ● The district fails to proactively identify students' support needs or relies on large-scale, standardized testing for this purpose.	
● The district ensures adequate time for teachers to communicate and plan across grade-level teams. The district encourages looping students with teachers for multiple years.	● Teachers rarely have time to meet together for common planning. Looping with students is not an option for the majority of teachers.	
● There are targeted family engagement strategies such as take-home books to read at home, text messages, and family involvement related to in-school curriculum.	● There are limited opportunities for families to engage in supporting their students' learning, or only certain families are targeted.	

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[3] For more see the EdResearch for Recovery [Broad-Based Academic Supports for All Students](#) brief.

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2. To what extent has the district ensured high-quality *instructional materials and curriculum-based professional learning?*[4]		Strategy: ☐☐☐☐☐☐☐
To arrive at a rating for this area, consider evidence from these sources: ● HQIM adopted, guidance and guardrails around adaptation ● PL plan for educators (frequency, content) ● Perception data from educators re: materials and PL (disaggregated) ● Evidence materials are used in classroom (e.g., walkthrough data) ● Interview with curriculum coordinators		
(4) Strong alignment looks like…	*(1) Weak alignment looks like…*	*Rating (4-1) and rationale*
● The district has adopted and ensures consistent implementation of high-quality (e.g., rated green by EdReports[5]), culturally relevant materials showcasing a diverse population and multiple perspectives. Materials are designed to meet the needs of all students including students with disabilities and English Learners. ● The district provides educators with access to a menu of resources, prioritizing a focus on strong practices and educator agency and ownership over fidelity of materials, while still ensuring strong guardrails to maintain rigor.	● High-quality, culturally relevant materials have not been adopted, do not meet the needs of all learners (e.g., students with disabilities and/or EL), or the district cannot ensure buildings consistently use them. ● Curriculum is adopted with overreliance on fidelity of materials over implementation of practices, or without clear flexibility guardrails resulting in variable implementation and quality.	
● The district provides extensive, ongoing, differentiated professional learning related to HQIM content, pedagogy, and assessment of student learning. Content is often applicable for educators to use the very next day. ● The district supports schools to establish high-quality professional learning communities (PLCs) or concentrated summer workshops for educators to collaborate on HQIM implementation, lessons and review work.	● There is no intentional or ongoing professional learning to support teachers to effectively use the materials; if PD exists, it is one-off, ineffective, or surface-level (e.g., focused solely on the format). ● PLCs focused on HQIM implementation are not in place or are used as "check-in" meetings. ● Turnover and lack of onboarding supports	

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[4] For more see the EdResearch for Recovery briefs Tier 1 Instructional Strategies to Improve K-4 Reading Comprehension and Broad-Based Academic Supports for All Students.
[5] If not rated by EdReports, districts can review their own curriculum using one of the following EdReports tools.

● There is ongoing onboarding for new teachers to ensure training and implementation support.	result in new teachers without HQIM training.
● The district proactively supports use of materials; teachers are involved in implementation decisions (e.g., timing) and adapt based on students' interests. ● District walkthroughs show evidence materials are used as intended and adapted with fidelity.	● Ineffective messaging results in teachers resisting materials they see as "de-professionalizing" them. ● The materials are not used consistently or are modified beyond the intent.

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3. Does the district provide focused, meaningful **instructional coaching** to improve educators' practice?[6]		Strategy: ⬜⬜⬛⬜⬜⬜⬜
To arrive at a rating for this area, consider evidence from these sources: ● District PD plans ● Educator feedback on quality/utility of PD and coaching ● Observation of district PD session ● Retention data, disaggregated ● Evaluation data (growth in specific competencies), disaggregated ● Coaching schedules ● Coach job descriptions and rosters		
(4) Strong alignment looks like…	*(1) Weak alignment looks like…*	*Rating (4-1) and rationale*
● The district ensures schools provide staff with numerous opportunities to receive sustained, job-embedded professional learning focused on relevant discrete skills and active learning, and opportunities for collaboration within and across schools (e.g., PLCs, learning communities).	● Professional learning opportunities are low quality, disconnected from staff's greatest needs, and/or un-engaging (e.g., "sit and get"). There are limited if any formal collaboration opportunities.	
● The district ensures that teachers receive individualized, time-intensive coaching (i.e., at least 1x every two weeks) sustained over the course of the semester or year that is context-specific, and focused on discrete skills. ● Generally, teachers are motivated to participate and invested in coaching as a way to learn new ideas and improve student learning.	● Teachers do not receive focused coaching and/or get a few scattered sessions focused on general teaching practices. ● Teachers are often reluctantly forced into receiving coaching, resulting in resistance and resentment.	
● The district ensures coaches have strong school and district support, they can effectively build relationships with teachers (e.g., limited coach-teacher ratios and strategic assignments based on experience and expertise), and their time is protected for coaching activities.[7]	● Coaches do not receive leadership support and must frequently focus on non-coaching activities (e.g., subbing, test administration). Many have large caseloads or the sole strategy for high-quality instruction.	

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[6] For more see the EdResearch for Recovery Improving Teaching Practice with Instructional Coaching brief.
[7] Positioning coaches as district-level vs. school-level support has shown to help with this.

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• The district hires coaches with strong instructional practices who can build effective relationships and credibility with teachers. • The district provides coaches with regular opportunities to connect and learn from peers, as well as onboarding and ongoing professional learning (e.g., approaches to instruction).	• Coaches lack instructional expertise and are often assigned as coach and evaluator to teachers they support (diminishing impact). • There are limited opportunities for coaches to grow in their practice or collaborate with one another.	

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4. Has the district effectively employed strategies to increase **student engagement and attendance?**[8]		Strategy: ⬚⬚⬚◼⬚⬚⬚
To arrive at a rating for this area, consider evidence from these sources: ● Attendance data, (disaggregated by subgroup) ● Walkthrough data on student engagement (disaggregated) ● Chronic absenteeism protocols and practices ● Student perception data on engagement (disaggregated)		
(4) Strong alignment looks like…	*(1) Weak alignment looks like…*	*Rating (4-1) and rationale*
● The district uses strategies to proactively reduce student absenteeism including providing safe and reliable transportation to/from school, timely attendance information to parents, proactive attendance pattern analysis and identification of chronically absent students, and positive messaging about school. ● When students are identified as chronically absent, the district supports schools to understand and address the underlying causes for the students' unique circumstances.	● The district does not engage in strategies to reduce student absenteeism, or employs unhelpful practices like setting expectations for perfect attendance. ● When students are chronically absent, little to no effort is put into understanding the underlying cause before schools move on or deploy punitive strategies (expulsion, suspension).	
● The district supports schools to ensure and measure (e.g., through perception data) that students are engaged with rigorous and engaging instruction, culturally relevant pedagogy, co-curricular opportunities, and role models or mentors. Classrooms see evidence of strong engagement with students taking ownership for and applying their learning.	● The district does not know the extent to which schools are providing strong student experiences or using student engagement best practices. Observed instruction is often teacher-led with students obviously disengaged.	

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[8] For more see the EdResearch for Recovery District Strategies to Reduce Student Absenteeism brief.

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5. To what extent has the district supported schools to **prioritize and implement intensive academic interventions?**[9]		Strategy: ▢▢▢▢▮▢▢
To arrive at a rating for this area, consider evidence from these sources: ● District ESSER plans/ strategic plans ● Early warning system data ● Student survey data, disaggregated		
(4) Strong alignment looks like…	*(1) Weak alignment looks like…*	*Rating (4-1) and rationale*
● The district provides effective interventions such as high dosage tutoring or extended learning interventions (e.g., weeklong accelerated academies staffed with highly effective teachers and double-dose math structures) for students in need. The district is strategic about ensuring highest-need students are receiving multiple acceleration opportunities (e.g., prioritizing those who receive tutoring for summer learning programs). ● The district has strong proactive monitoring systems, norms, and routines (e.g., through an MTSS) around early student warning signs to id students *before* support is critical.	● There are no targeted tutoring interventions for students in need. Students receive most of their additional support during the regular school day, without time for additional acceleration. There is an intentional approach to ensure the highest-need students receive multiple acceleration opportunities. ● Students who are falling behind are often not "caught" until it is too late and they are already failing. ● There is minimal focus on social- emotional supports for students.	

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[9] For more see the EdResearch for Recovery School Practices to Address Student Learning Loss brief.

6. If applicable, does the district provide **rigorous tutoring programs** for students aligned to evidence around best practice?[10]		Strategy: ⬜⬜⬜⬜◻⬜
To arrive at a rating for this area, consider evidence from these sources: ● Tutoring program specifics (e.g., staffing, curriculum) ● Training & support plans for tutors ● Tutoring program data (e.g, attendance, engagement, achievement, perception from participants), disaggregated ● Interview with tutoring coordinator		
(4) Strong alignment looks like…	*(1) Weak alignment looks like…*	*Rating (4-1) and rationale*
● The district tutoring program supports groups up to four students at a minimum of three sessions per week (30-60 min/day, for >10 weeks), or as intensive week-long small-group (<10 student) programs taught by talented teachers.[11] Ideally, it is offered during or immediately after the school day. ● Tutors rely on high-quality instructional materials aligned with classroom content and focus on building foundational skills connected to what students learn in class. ● The district provides clear learning objectives and rigorous evaluations to assess program effectiveness, and supports tutors to use data and informal assessments to tailor instruction.	● The district's tutoring program has no minimum dosage requirements or offers infrequent (e.g., 1x/week) light touch tutoring; it is primarily offered in large groups outside the school day or during summer. ● Tutoring materials are not high-quality nor aligned to classroom content, often focused on remediation using prior grade-level materials. ● The district does not use data (e.g., surveys, benchmark assessments) to assess effectiveness and improve support.	
● The district takes an expansive view of who can be effective tutors including but not limited to certified teachers, providing them adequate training, support, and consistent assignments when possible for stronger relationships and understanding of students' needs.	● The district only considers certified teachers as potential effective tutors, not exploring others (e.g., para- professionals, AmeriCorps fellows). Tutors receive inadequate training, support, and oversight.	
● Tutoring is a core part of students' educational experience. It is seen as an opportunity for positive support, ideally (if	● Tutoring has a negative stigma as remediation or punishment, dis- incentivizing participation.	

[10] For more see the EdResearch for Recovery Accelerating Student Learning with High-Dosage Tutoring brief.
[11] Elementary students may benefit from shorter but more frequent sessions (i.e., 20 minutes, five times a week). For more see the EdResearch for Recovery Accelerating Student Learning with High-Dosage Tutoring brief.

cost allows) for all students in a lower-performing grade level or school for broader organizational commitment.	Students must "opt-in," exacerbating inequities.	

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*7. If applicable, does the district provide a **quality summer learning program** for students?[12]*		Strategy: ▢▢▢▢▢▊
To arrive at a rating for this area, consider evidence from these sources: ● Summer learning plans (staffing, curriculum, rosters) ● Interview with summer learning coordinator ● Observation of summer learning session ● Communication of opportunities to families		
(4) Strong alignment looks like…	*(1) Weak alignment looks like…*	*Rating (4-1) and rationale*
● The district provides intensive summer learning programs of at least five weeks with >3 hours per day of academic instruction. Classes are capped at 15 students to ensure individualized support and strong adult-student relationships. ● Summer programs include high quality instructional materials aligned to school-year content and student needs, prioritizing engaging and "SAFE" (sequenced, active, focused, and explicit) enrichment activities. ● The district frames summer learning programs as positive opportunities (as opposed to punishment) and clearly communicates the expectation and importance of attendance for those that sign up.	● Summer learning programs are short (<3 weeks) with large classes (>15 students) reducing individual attention, relationships, and meaningful differentiation. ● Program design prioritizes offering students a place to be (time in classroom) over meaningful and enjoyable academic instruction and enrichment activities. ● Communication about summer learning programs results in negative perceptions (e.g., as punishment) and/or assumptions attendance is optional.	
● Participating students are generally engaged and consistently attend, especially those with the greatest academic needs. ● The program is staffed with certified teachers with content knowledge and grade-level experience, and specialized support personnel for students with disabilities; staff work the entire program duration. Materials are provided to staff in advance, allowing them to maximize academic learning time, teach more content, and have greater satisfaction	● Attendance and student engagement is low or inconsistent, especially for students in the greatest need of support. ● Staff are not instructionally strong, consistent, and/or receive insufficient support to meet needs of students with disabilities or English Learners. Instructors create their own lesson plans that are often not aligned to the district's high quality materials.	

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[12] For more see the EdResearch for Recovery [Summer Learning Programs](#) brief.

with the program. ● The district ensures adequate program management and early planning beginning at latest in January (led by half-time summer program directors in large districts).	● Program planning is haphazard or last minute, with unclear responsibility for this work.

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STEP 2: Prioritize

Prioritization is key for successful implementation of recovery initiatives. Teams should prioritize where to focus on strengthening alignment based on what will provide the greatest impact, opportunity, and results for students.

Analyze: Based on the ratings and look-fors from the reflection rubric, consider which areas should be top priority to better align with evidence. In particular, consider the following:

- Which areas are least aligned to evidence currently, and might benefit the most from progress in the coming months?
- Which areas are most aligned with internal strategic goals and existing priorities?
- Which areas have the greatest need or would allow the greatest improvements in reducing inequities in performance and experiences across subgroups?
- For which areas or aspects do you already have district capacity and resources to execute (e.g., people, money, technology, stakeholder buy-in and or system momentum)?
- Which areas would you need to cadence first - either as required to be in place for others or would enable faster progress on others down the road?

If needed, map your top ideas on a chart like the one to the right based on the level of importance and difficulty of each.

Prioritize: Based on above, select up to three priorities to focus on for at least the next 6 months:

1.

2.

3.

Review: Reflect and revise priorities as needed based on how well they will contribute to more equitable opportunities and/or outcomes for students.
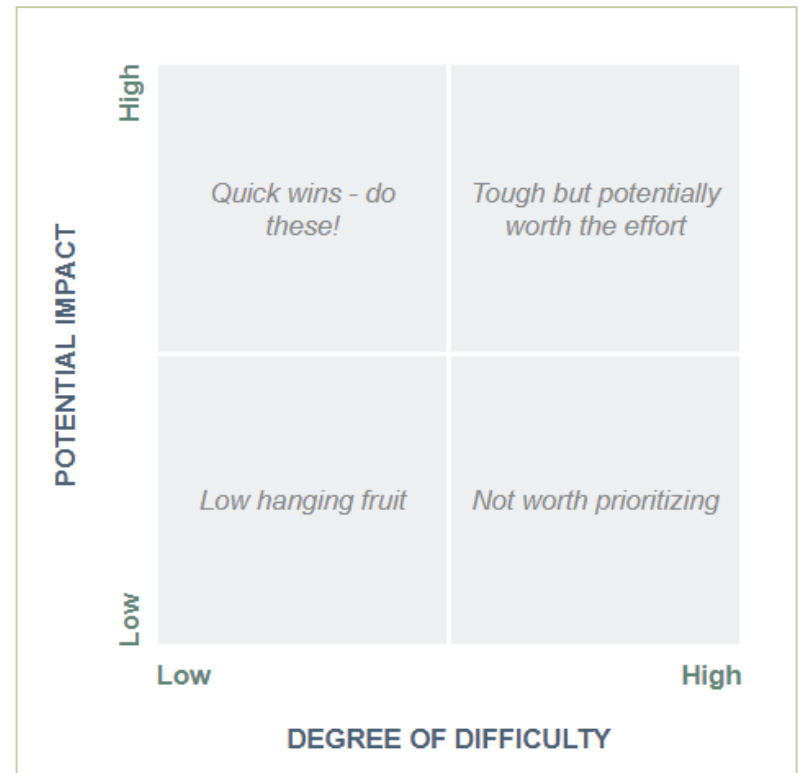
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STEP 3: Plan

For each priority listed above, work with your team to complete the planning roadmap:

PRIORITY NAME	
Description *What is this you are focused on doing?*	
Rating and opportunity *What is the current rating of alignment to evidence (per reflection rubric, above)?* *What opportunities exist for strengthening this over time?*	
Root cause *What is currently standing in your way?* *Why haven't you achieved this to date?*	
What it would take *What would the district need to commit to, secure, or build to be successful in this work?* **E.g., resources needed ($, tech, people); policies or practices to establish; skills or knowledge to acquire…*	
Reduce inequities *How will this priority contribute to more equitable opportunities and/or outcomes for students?* *What specific equity considerations will be taken into account to ensure this work results in more equitable outcomes?*	

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Stakeholders to engage *Who needs to be informed, engaged, and supported to make this successful?* **Make sure to consider stakeholders throughout the chain of people required to do the work: those involved in the design and decision making, those implementing and supporting, those possible or likely to block or resist the initiative, those with relevant expertise and/or resources, and the end users or recipients most affected by the initiative.*		

Defining success *What could you realistically and meaningfully accomplish in…*	…6 months	
	…1 year	
	…3 years	

Action plan *What specific action steps will you take to get there?* **Add more rows if/as needed*	Action	Timeline	Owner

STEP 4: Progress monitor

Periodically (ideally each quarter), revisit this tool to:
- Reflect on progress and alignment of this priority using the reflection rubric above to determine if/how rating has changed.
- Revise the plan in Step 2 accordingly to further advance the work and ensure even stronger alignment.