

COHERENCE ACROSS INITIATIVES¹

This tool is part of the *EdResearch Act on Evidence Toolkit* which was created by EdResearch for Action² in partnership with DeliverEd³ 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 in a way that promotes coherence across initiatives.

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.



¹ For more see Coherence Lab (initiative of CCSSO and Education First)’s [Coherence Toolkit](#); [DeliverEd](#)’s Capacity Framework. The following resources informed the following rubric: [Association of California School Administrator](#) post on [Assessing Equity Leadership in Schools and Districts](#); [EdTrust](#)’s [Districts That Succeed: Breaking the Correlation Between Race, Poverty, and Achievement](#); [EdResearch for Action](#) brief [Reducing District Budgets Responsibly](#); [New York City Department of Education](#)’s [Framework for Great Schools](#); and [Tennessee](#)’s [Leaders for Equity Playbook](#).

² [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.

³ [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. Clear and coherent plan | | |
| 2. Clearly-defined priorities | | |
| 3. Clear roles and responsibilities | | |
| 4. Information sharing and collaboration | | |
| 5. Continuous review and revision | | |

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1. To what extent does the district have a clear and coherent plan for implementing key recovery initiatives?

Strategy:



To arrive at a rating for this area, consider evidence from these sources:

- Program descriptions / plans including how they are coordinated across functional areas - academic support; mental health and well-being; family engagement; teacher well-being.
- Stakeholder perception data re: knowledge of plans, disaggregated

| <i>(4) Strong alignment looks like...</i> | <i>(1) Weak alignment looks like...</i> | <i>Rating (4-1) and rationale</i> |
|--------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------|-----------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------|-----------------------------------|
| <ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Leaders actively build a shared vision around and plan for execution of key initiatives aligned to concrete academic outcomes or other success measures for students. • Plans are clearly articulated and comprehensive enough to cover key recovery initiatives and intended outcomes for learning acceleration. | <ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Plans for initiatives do not exist, aren't clear, are implied vs. written down, and/or aren't aligned to concrete outcomes for students. • If plans do exist, they are not aligned to meaningfully move key recovery indicators. | |
| <ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Plans are coherent across functional areas and funding streams (braiding funding sources when possible) and supported with necessary infrastructure to implement. • Leaders at all levels create and support conditions to enable focus, collaboration, and an integrated approach to implementing plans. | <ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Plans are not coherent and connected, and/or there is insufficient funding or infrastructure to actually implement. • There are barriers to coherence within the agency/ department. | |
| <ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Stakeholders that are closest to the policies or initiatives were involved in design and decision-making related to the work. • All stakeholders are aware of and understand the structure and purpose of initiatives of the plan. | <ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Stakeholders are unable to articulate the plan or are opposed to it. • Stakeholders were not included in design/ to give input on approach | |

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2. To what extent has the district identified a small number of **clearly-defined priorities** aimed at addressing the root causes of its most pressing recovery challenges?

Strategy:



To arrive at a rating for this area, consider evidence from these sources:

- Documented plan(s) that include clearly-defined priorities.
- Procedures for agreeing on elevating vs. de-prioritizing initiatives
- Resource management processes, particularly for ESSER funds, that are aligned to priorities

| <i>(4) Strong alignment looks like...</i> | <i>(1) Weak alignment looks like...</i> | <i>Rating (4-1) and rationale</i> |
|----------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------|----------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------|-----------------------------------|
| <ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Leaders model and measure the relentless pursuit of a small number of clearly-defined priorities. Leaders are coordinated and intentional about rigorously implementing a few key priorities - adjusting based on data. • Priorities are selected based on a nuanced understanding of the challenges in order to target students in need of the most support. | <ul style="list-style-type: none"> • There are too many programs / initiatives with no clear sense of priorities within (everything is a priority). Priorities are primarily “one-size-fits all” initiatives rather than targeted efforts to achieve equity. | |
| <ul style="list-style-type: none"> • The organization strategically aligns resources to its highest priorities, and continually adjusts and revises plans as needed to respond to new contexts (e.g., pandemic, availability of new funding sources) and maintain alignment. | <ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Priorities exist in name only and are rarely if ever adjusted and revised to respond to new contexts. Resources are allocated based on historical practice or outdated priorities; there is no alignment of resources with current priorities. | |
| <ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Leaders identify when there are distractors, inefficiencies or too many priorities. They help others say no to or reduce work that doesn’t align to the core priorities. | <ul style="list-style-type: none"> • The organization does not maintain a consistent focus; priorities shift with “political winds” or chasing funding opportunities. | |

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| 3. Has the district identified clear roles and responsibilities for effective implementation of the work? | | Strategy: □□■□□ |
|-----------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------|-----------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------|----------------------------|
| <p>To arrive at a rating for this area, consider evidence from these sources:</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Priorities have a singular owner for accountability and execution. • Job descriptions include role and responsibility expectations | | |
| (4) Strong alignment looks like... | (1) Weak alignment looks like... | Rating (4-1) and rationale |
| <ul style="list-style-type: none"> • The district has identified explicit owners of each priority and teams identified to carry out the work. | <ul style="list-style-type: none"> • There is no clear ownership of the work, or priorities are assigned to groups. | |
| <ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Roles and responsibilities are clear; everyone understands what is expected and what they need to do to be successful. | <ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Roles and responsibilities for the work are either not articulated, or unclear. | |
| <ul style="list-style-type: none"> • District leaders have maintained structures of reciprocal responsibility; people are held accountable and supported to develop necessary knowledge, skills, and mindsets to execute effectively. | <ul style="list-style-type: none"> • There are no structures of accountability for responsibilities and/or no strategic supports for staff to execute effectively. | |

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| 4. To what extent does the district facilitate <i>information sharing and collaboration</i> across prioritized initiatives? | | Strategy: □□□□ |
|--------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------|-------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------|----------------------------|
| <p>To arrive at a rating for this area, consider evidence from these sources:</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Routines for information sharing (e.g. cross-functional meetings or collaboration) • Stakeholder perception regarding culture of collaboration, disaggregated | | |
| (4) Strong alignment looks like... | (1) Weak alignment looks like... | Rating (4-1) and rationale |
| <ul style="list-style-type: none"> • The district prioritizes actively sharing information across initiatives and seeking to break down organizational silos. • There is ongoing and meaningful collaboration across teams including across lines of difference. | <ul style="list-style-type: none"> • There is little to no collaboration across district offices and teams. Initiatives are siloed, rarely pulling in other ideas/input before making decisions or sharing info across (right hand doesn't know what left is doing). | |
| <ul style="list-style-type: none"> • District leaders have identified critical interdependencies between the agency's priorities and the work of their departments • Leaders model, encourage, and expect collaboration among their colleagues. | <ul style="list-style-type: none"> • The overall district culture is territorial, competitive, or siloed. Leaders do not model or encourage collaboration. | |

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5. Are there regular, structured conversations between the leader and those accountable for implementation to **continuously review progress and revise the plan as needed?**

Strategy:

□□□□■

To arrive at a rating for this area, consider evidence from these sources:

- Progress monitoring conversation routines: Calendar, agenda, supporting data and notes
- Observation of progress monitoring conversation
- Evidence of plan modification and update over time.

| <i>(4) Strong alignment looks like...</i> | <i>(1) Weak alignment looks like...</i> | <i>Rating (4-1) and rationale</i> |
|-------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------|-------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------|-----------------------------------|
| <ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Leaders proactively identify and address problems in timely ways; individuals throughout are empowered to address problems. | <ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Problems are noted but are not prioritized or acted upon systematically. • There is a culture of hiding problems or playing the “blame game.” | |
| <ul style="list-style-type: none"> • District leaders have regular conversations with accountable owners to discuss progress, problem-solve, and identify next steps; these conversations use quantitative and qualitative data as evidence of progress. | <ul style="list-style-type: none"> • There is no structure or routine for meaningful feedback on implementation, including identifying barriers to progress. • When there are progress monitoring conversations, they do not focus on data or evidence of progress and leaders are not held accountable for next steps. | |
| <ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Leaders view their work through a continuous learning and improvement lens, promoting organizational learning and change to learn from, adapt to, and ensure efforts are impactful. • The plans/initiatives are revised to continuously improve over time. • Action items are followed up and implemented to accelerate impact. | <ul style="list-style-type: none"> • There is a lack of follow-through when opportunities for improvement are identified. • The written plan is rarely updated in response; work reverts to “business as usual.” | |

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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:

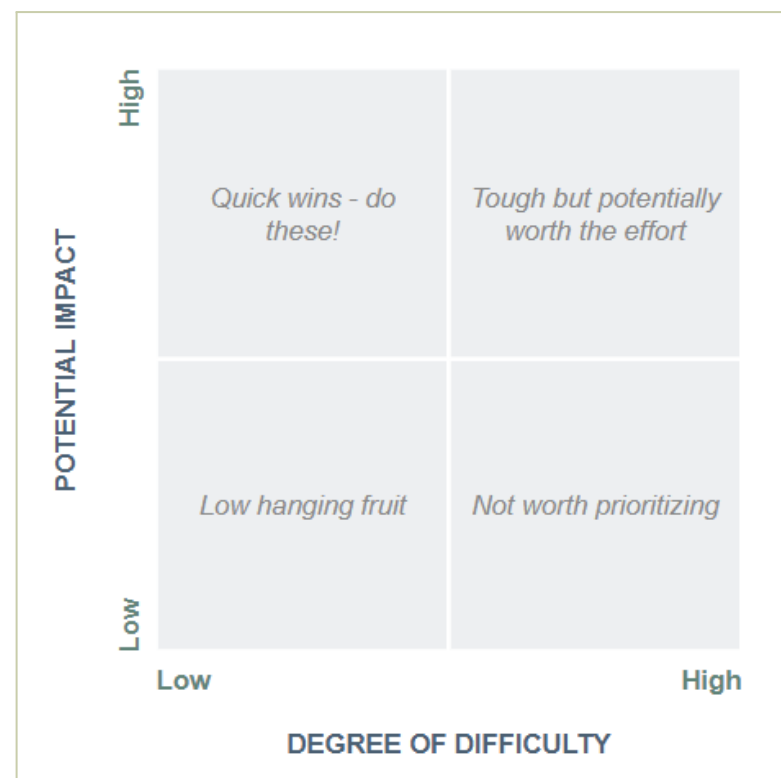
- Which areas are least aligned to evidence currently, and might benefit the most from progress in the coming months?
- Which areas are most aligned with internal strategic goals and existing priorities?
- Which areas have the greatest need or would allow the greatest improvements in reducing inequities 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 <i>What is this you are focused on doing?</i> | |
| Rating and opportunity <i>What is the current rating of alignment to evidence (per reflection rubric, above)? What opportunities exist for strengthening this over time?</i> | |
| Root cause <i>What is currently standing in your way of strong alignment? Why haven't you achieved this to date?</i> | |
| What it would take <i>What would the district need to commit to, secure, or build to be successful in this work?</i> <i>*E.g., resources needed (\$, tech, people); policies or practices to establish; skills or knowledge to acquire...</i> | |
| Reduce inequities <i>How will this priority contribute to more equitable opportunities and/or outcomes for students?</i> | |

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| | | | | |
|---------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------|-------------|---------------|-----------------|--------------|
| <i>What specific equity considerations will be taken into account to ensure this work results in more equitable outcomes?</i> | | | | |
| Stakeholders to engage <i>Who needs to be informed, engaged, and supported to make this successful?</i> <i>*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.</i> | | | | |
| Defining success <i>What could you realistically and meaningfully accomplish in...</i> | ...6 months | | | |
| | ...1 year | | | |
| | ...3 years | | | |
| Action plan <i>What specific action steps will you take to get there?</i> <i>*Add more rows if/as needed</i> | | 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.