

10 Lessons Learned from SEA and LEA SCTG Sites

The purpose of this guide is to share lessons learned from the past five years working with State Education Agency (SEA) and Local Education Agency (LEA) School Climate Transformation Grantees. SEAs and LEAs are more likely to use SCTG resources to promote effective change when the systems change efforts include the following elements.

1. Focus on Outcomes

SEAs and LEAs that focus on improving student outcomes increase the precision with which they plan, implement, monitor, and adjust project activities to enhance student success. By focusing on results, rather than activities (e.g., training events), SEAs and LEAs increase the likelihood of enhancing their school climate.

2. Clearly Define the Work

Clearly defining the work, including individual roles and responsibilities, helps with establishing commitment and an understanding of importance of high implementation fidelity. A SEA or LEA with a legislative or policy mandate can more effectively establish positive school climate and improve social, emotional, behavioral, and academic outcomes for students. An essential element of a policy mandate is for every LEA in the state to define an annual goal around establishing a positive, school-wide social climate.

3. Establish a Leadership Team

States and districts are more successful when they establish a leadership team to select, implement, and evaluate implementation of evidence-based practices within a multi-tiered behavioral framework (MTBF).

- **Composition.** The leadership team should include a group of individuals who have (a) organizational authority – they can make decisions, (b) budget authority – management and alignment of budgets, (c) content knowledge – core features and logic model associated with MTBF practices and systems, and (d) alignment and integration opportunities – work with others who have similar outcome priorities.
- **Coordinator.** The leadership team needs a person with significant FTE (>.50) dedicated to coordinating and implementing the decisions of the team. This person needs to be knowledgeable about the SEA or LEA office, fluent with the content of MTBF implemented practices and systems, and effective at dissemination and communication with leaders and coordinators of related initiatives and priorities. Ideally, this person is selected from existing personnel and already has MTBF-related expertise, experience, and responsibilities.
- **Meeting Schedule.** The leadership team needs to meet at least monthly if they are to manage large-scale implementation efforts.

SEAs or LEAs that propose a “leadership position,” but not a team, are less likely to produce functional effects and sustainable implementation across time and personnel. A leadership

team without the relevant knowledge or authority is less likely to produce change. In addition, leadership teams that meet quarterly or less are more focused on “being informed” than on “producing change” and maximizing student benefit.

A grantee focused on MTSS implementation should be able to identify in their proposal the persons who will be on their leadership team and the person who will serve as coordinator. If they propose to search for such a position, it too often indicates that they are not prepared. Similarly, investing in existing personnel and positions, rather than adding temporary grant-funded coordination and leadership, is associated with greater sustained capacity building within the organization and, especially, when grant funding ceases.

4. **Align SCTG with Key Initiatives**

Given the large demands on SEAs and LEAs, capacity and resources are limited to take on many additional initiatives. Aligned systems are more likely to be implemented with fidelity and sustained over time when implementers can see clear connections between the SCTG and other mandates and requirements. Alignment builds on initiatives by leveraging funding, training, and evaluation to improve sustained implementation of efficient and effective practices.

SEAs and LEAs that are more effective (a) adopt only programs and practices that have empirical documentation of effectiveness, (b) minimize the adoption of practices and programs that overlap with respect to activities and outcomes, (c) ensure selected practices and programs align with priority outcomes, (d) establish SEA and LEA-level procedures for aligning practices and programs so local districts/schools have a coherent and efficient process, (e) simultaneously consider the extent to which practice implementation fidelity can be assessed, and (f) examine the degree to which implementation expertise exists and/or can be developed.

5. **Specify Data Systems**

Any SEA or LEA focusing on large-scale implementation of MTBF need to define the data systems used to (a) identify need, (b) monitor capacity improvement, (c) assess fidelity with which core practices are implemented, and (d) assess impact on students/families. Capacity improvement and implementation fidelity are particularly important at the SEA and LEA levels.

- **State Capacity.** SEAs are more likely to be successful if they agree to at least annually assess the capacity of the state using some formal metric. The State Capacity Assessment (SCA) is one option, and a new State Systems Fidelity Inventory (SSFI), based on the [Implementation Blueprint](#) (available from the Center on PBIS by Spring 2019).
- **District Capacity.** Any formal effort to implement educational change needs to define how to improve the capacity of local districts to conduct implementation of effective practices. A valid metric for assessing district capacity should be administered at least annually, and preferable at least twice a year. The District Capacity Assessment (DCA) is one option, and a new District Systems Fidelity Inventory (DSFI), based on the [Implementation Blueprint](#) (available from the Center on PBIS by Summer 2019).

- ***Fidelity of Practice Implementation.*** Any SEA or LEA implementing evidence-based practices in a MTBF on a large scale needs to stipulate a metric and process for assessing the fidelity with which core features of the program/practice are implemented to criterion. Schools should use fidelity measures 2 to 4 times per year to assess need, develop action plans, identify successes, and assess impact of fidelity on student outcomes. The [Tiered Fidelity Inventory \(TFI\)](#) is one option that efficiently identifies fidelity at Tier 1, Tier 2, and Tier 3. Any proposal that lacks a specified metric and process for fidelity measurement is less likely to produce functional outcomes.
- ***Student Outcomes.*** Proposals that result in positive effects document the SEA and LEA expectation for district and school collection, summary, and reporting of student outcomes. An ongoing process should monitor at least (a) office discipline referrals, (b) suspension and expulsion patterns, (c) attendance, and (d) law enforcement encounters. These data should be easily disaggregated, with instant graphing, by (a) grade level, (b) disability, (c) ethnicity, and (d) socio-economic status.

Many SEAs and LEAs are becoming more sophisticated in their collection and summary of data, but they have yet to build formal decision-making procedures by which data are used at the school, district, region, and state. Recent research findings suggest that educators need support in using data for practical decision-making, problem-solving, and action planning. As such, efficient systems have a relatively small set of important questions and decisions around which data collection systems are developed and operated. In addition, these questions and decisions are examined on a regular basis to inform timely decision making, using efficient, predictable, and effective team-based problems solving structures and routines.

6. Provide Differentiated District Supports

Any effort to build large-scale or district-wide implementation of evidence-based practices within a MTBF needs to indicate how resources used to differentiate support across schools and educators in their district. Development of the implementation relationship between the LEA and individual schools (e.g., PBIS Implementation Blueprint) should consider implementation elements (e.g., policy, training, evaluation, demonstrations, teaming) and capacity development self-assessment tools (e.g., DSFI, TFI).

7. Develop Training, Coaching, and Technical Expertise

SEAs and LEAs are more likely to succeed in implementing evidence-based practices through a MTBF when they focus on both (a) how resources can provide training, coaching, and content expertise to local schools and (b) how these resources are used to establish capacity more locally and more cost effectively.

- ***Train Teams.*** Training and professional development opportunities are delivered to teams (district or school) rather than individuals, and link training to on-site coaching that is delivered immediately after training.

- **Invest in Content Expertise.** Technical expertise in behavioral theory and support is needed especially for successful implementation of Tier 2 and Tier 3 behavior supports.
- **Develop Local Training and Coaching Expertise.** Sufficient training and coaching expertise is needed within the SEA and/or LEA to (a) ensure sustained implementation when external resources are no longer available and (b) enable scaling implementation as more LEAs and schools express interest.

8. Engage in Meaningful Evaluation Activities

Evaluation activities are critical for SEAs and LEAs to (a) summarize and communicate key findings with stakeholders, (b) hold themselves accountable to implementing with fidelity, improving outcomes, and building local capacity; and (c) guide decisions about enhancements or adjustments to project activities to maximize outcomes. Effective evaluations include the following components.

- **Identify Key Evaluation Questions.** Evaluation activities should be guided by specific questions. For SEA and LEA SCTGs, the evaluation questions must include the GPRA questions specified in the RFP. In addition, relevant questions may include:
 - Are schools implementing practices and systems in the MTBF with **fidelity**?
 - Among schools implementing with fidelity, are *all* educators and students experiencing desired **outcomes** (e.g., decreased ODRs, suspensions, expulsions, and law enforcement contacts; improved attendance, academic scores, and perceptions of school climate and safety)? Are these outcomes experienced equitably by all subgroups (i.e., when data are disaggregated by race and ethnicity, gender, disability status, and other relevant demographic characteristics)?
 - To what extent is the SEA or LEA building **local capacity** to sustain these implementation fidelity and outcomes in the absence of external funding?
- **Select Relevant Measures and Indicators.** For each evaluation question, identify relevant measures or indicators of fidelity, outcomes, and capacity. (See Section 5.)
- **Select a System to Facilitate Decision-Making.** To facilitate collecting, entering, and reporting data, invest in a system that maximizes efficiency and flexibility for data entry and reporting. In particular, having effective visual displays (e.g., graphs, info-graphics) facilitates data-based decision-making and evaluation. [PBISApps](#) is one system that facilitates entering, tracking, and reporting data related to fidelity (e.g., TFI, DSFI, and SSFI) and key student outcomes (e.g., ODRs, school climate).
- **Analyze and Report Data to Address Each Evaluation Question.** For each evaluation question, (a) summarize relevant data, (b) ensure accuracy and clarity of the data summary, and (c) include relevant graphics to illustrate key findings. Specifically, consider the following guidelines in summarizing and interpreting findings.
 - Summarize MTBF implementation **fidelity** of Tier 1, Tier 2, and Tier 3 practices and systems (e.g., the number of schools implementing with fidelity at each tier during each project year).

- Examine **outcomes** among schools and districts that are implementing with fidelity, in comparison with schools and districts that are not implementing with fidelity.
- Document efforts and assessments (e.g., DSFI, SSFI) that indicate the SEA or LEA is building **internal capacity** to enable sustained implementation fidelity and outcomes of MTBF when grant-funded supports end.

9. Build Capacity in Implementation Cascade during Pilot Activities

SEAs or LEAs considering implementation of a new program, practice, or approach should be encouraged to not just launch small “pilot” demonstrations with a few schools, but to specifically indicate how pilot efforts require LEA capacity and/or SEA capacity. Pilots should represent a slice of the entire state or district system (i.e., the implementation cascade from SEA to LEA to school to educators to students), while focusing on documentation of effective implementation fidelity and practical demonstration of student improvement.

10. Invest in Local Implementation Capacity

Acquisition of MTBF and sustainability are enhanced when the SEA and LEA work is leveraged and connected to existing infrastructure of supports. Local implementation capacity is dependent on the interconnected system of SEA, LEA, and schools in supporting school climate. Successful LEAs and SEAs develop and annually revisit a 5-year plan that gives priority to professional development, leadership, funding, personnel, and evaluation policies and procedures for enabling sustained implementation when grant funding ends.

- **Build Systems to Support Implementation.** Any SEA or LEA proposing to implement evidence-based practices through a MTBF on a significant scale should address specific systems (e.g., training, coaching, data structures) that are used to establish sustained adoption of new practices. Initial implementation without emphasis on sustainability results in repeated investment per site and limited scale of implementation.
- **Promote Scalability.** In addition to sustainability, a long-term implementation vision and action plan should indicate how expansion of implementation are supported. Of particular interest are organizational strategies that enable expanded practice adoption while (a) maintaining fidelity implementation in existing efforts, (b) extending implementation opportunities to new LEA and school sites, and (c) providing boosters for sites that waver in their implementation efforts.
- **Consider Integration and Alignment.** An important consideration is how the SEA and LEA integrate their efforts into and with new initiatives, issues, or programs that may become priorities or accompany change in leadership.

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