



A RUBRIC FOR ASSESSING SCHOOLS' PLANS FOR RAPID IMPROVEMENT

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About the Center on School Turnaround (CST). The CST is one of 7 national Content Centers in a federal network of 22 Comprehensive Centers. The U.S. Department of Education charges the centers with building the capacity of state education agencies (SEAs) to assist districts and schools in meeting student achievement goals. The goal of the CST is to provide technical assistance and to identify, synthesize, and disseminate research-based practices and emerging promising practices that will lead to the increased capacity of SEAs to support districts in turning around their lowest-performing schools. The CST is a partnership of WestEd and the Academic Development Institute, the Darden/Curry Partnership for Leaders in Education at the University of Virginia, and the National Implementation Research Network.

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Introduction

School improvement planning has become more prevalent and important due to increased calls from federal and state governments, state education agencies (SEAs), and the general public for more accountability in education. Federal legislation, such as the No Child Left Behind Act of 2001 and the Every Student Succeeds Act of 2015, requires all low-performing schools to create yearly school improvement plans. In many cases, the school principal is responsible for conceptualizing, drafting, and submitting the plan.

However, there are very few publicly available tools that assess the content and quality of school improvement plans (SIPs). Of the handful of SIP rubrics that have been created, nearly all are part of research studies that are only available in academic journals, making them inaccessible to many of the audiences who need them the most. Accordingly, we have created a SIP assessment rubric for use by schools, districts, and state education agencies (SEAs). Schools can use the rubric to help create, organize, and assess their improvement plans and efforts; districts can use it to facilitate and coach co-creation of effective SIPs; and SEAs can use it to better conceptualize how they support districts — especially those with low-performing schools — in analyzing their SIPs. Although this rubric is useful for all types of schools, we feel it is especially valuable for low-performing schools because it can help them better jumpstart the process of planning for success, building momentum, and, ultimately, turning themselves around.

Drawing from the research literature and our extensive practical experience with the University of Virginia Partnership for Leaders in Education (UVA/PLE), the rubric includes 12 key planning domains that support effective year-long or short-cycle SIPs (see Table 1).

In this document, we discuss the importance of school improvement planning, the uses of a SIP assessment rubric, and how we created this rubric. We then describe each of the 12 planning domains before presenting the rubric and directions for how to use it.

The Importance of School Improvement Planning

Principals are one of the most influential factors on student achievement in schools (Nichols, Glass, & Berliner, 2012). Effective principals are also the main drivers of improvement efforts and positive change within their buildings, as they have formal purview over instruction, assessment, personnel, budgeting, safety, and scores of other tasks. Some of the most important school leadership practices that emerge from the research literature are vision creation, development of aligned goals, and overall strategic planning (Leithwood, 2012; Hitt & Tucker, 2016). For low-performing schools, the SIP process can be a rich opportunity for a principal, leadership team, and school community to thoughtfully determine what the school can become, how the school's resources are currently assigned, and how those resource assignments need to change to help realize the vision.

In fact, of all turnaround-principal leadership practices, perhaps most foundational to launching a turnaround is the creation of a compelling vision with aligned goals (Leithwood, 2012). Developing a sense of where the school wishes to go, why, and how it will collectively get there undergirds all else that follows (Duke, 2015), and school leaders are wise to devote significant time and thought to the process.

Table 1. The 12 Planning Domains of a High-Quality School Improvement Plan

Planning Domain	Description
Overarching Vision	
1. Turnaround Vision	The principal leads the school leadership team and school community in urgently developing stated aims and objectives that establish how the school will be different once its turnaround is complete.
Activities and Progress Measures	
2. Priorities	The school principal identifies two to four high-leverage priorities that will help to quickly remove current barriers to change and provide the foundation for advanced work and further improvements.
3. Process Outcomes	The results assumed once priorities are successfully addressed.
4. Progress Indicators	Measures that gauge progress toward improved outcomes.
5. Action Steps	The list of critical, high-leverage action steps that must be taken in order to achieve a process outcome, and subsequently, a priority.
Context	
6. School Context	The set of circumstances, facts, and nuances to a school and within its environment that requires customization.
7. Root Cause Analysis	An approach to problem solving used for identifying foundational faults or the “why(s)” of problems.
Organization	
8. Sequencing	The arrangement of priorities, process outcomes, and action steps in particular orders.
9. Schedule/Timeline	The schedule of critical events and procedures to be completed within the plan’s designated time period.
10. Alignment	The proper coordination or relation of the various components of the plan (e.g., priorities align with the turnaround vision).
Resources	
11. Directly Responsible Individual(s)	The person or people charged with completing action steps.
12. Supports	The obtainable materials and resources (human and capital) identified as important to conduct the turnaround.

Given the importance of mapping out a school's overall direction and accompanying goals, the *substance* of the goals should be aligned with the practices that are known or theorized to improve low-performing schools (Meyers & Hitt, 2017). That is, the vision and accompanying goals should reflect research on how turnaround leaders, and their districts, actually succeed in “turning around” their schools (Herman et al., 2008).

The Benefits of Short-Cycle School Improvement Planning

Given the high-stakes accountability demands for rapid school improvement, a year-long approach to school improvement planning may not create the sense of urgency that low-performing schools need to turn around (Duke, 2015; Kotter, 1995). Although year-long plans are well intended, they can be excessively long and seldom treated as a living document (Duke, Carr, & Sterrett, 2013). Thus, it may be more beneficial to break down the traditional year-long approach into more discrete and manageable phases through a practice we refer to as *short-cycle school improvement planning*.

Short-cycle planning can be a more flexible and productive approach to school improvement for low-performing schools because it aids in organizing the often overwhelming and messy work that comes with turning around a school (Duke, 2015). Short-cycle planning typically takes a 90-day outlook, which enables schools to gauge their progress more frequently and permits principals to take a better pulse of progress than the traditional year-long planning process. In turn, this approach can lead to more intentional adjustments and improvements in organizational learning, which can help these schools create the sense of urgency needed to build momentum, progress toward meeting goals, and eventually realize an overarching vision.

The Uses of a Comprehensive School Improvement Plan Rubric

Given the lack of publicly available SIP rubrics, we saw a need to create a clear, comprehensive rubric that could be used by school officials (e.g., principals, instructional coaches), district officials (e.g., superintendents, assistant superintendents for curriculum and instruction), and SEA officials (e.g., directors, accountability coordinators) in a variety of ways, described below.

Planning tool. Principals that need to develop a year-long or short-cycle SIP can use the rubric as a planning tool and checklist that outlines the various planning domains they need to consider and the elements they need to include in their SIP. The rubric can also be used as a guide for principals leading turnaround efforts, as it provides them with a series of guideposts (i.e., the 12 planning domains) that they can use to help organize and refine their school improvement work.

Assessment tool. In districts and SEAs, the rubric can serve as a reference tool for administrators to assess the quality of the SIPs submitted for review and approval. The rubric can help SEAs expand the focus of their SIP reviews beyond compliance to also consider how appropriate and effective the various elements of the plan are for helping the school achieve its improvement goals.

Coaching and collaboration tool. The rubric can also be used as a coaching and collaboration instrument within a school and/or between a school and district. The rubric outlines clear school improvement planning expectations that principals and assistant principals can use to better plan, retool, and carry out their work. In addition to being used as an assessment tool in the SIP review process, the rubric also provides structured reference points — that is, the 12 planning domains — to help guide discussions between the leaders of a particular school and the district. By participating in the SIP review process, a district leader gains insight into a school's particular needs while a school leader can better understand a district's set of priorities. Using the rubric to facilitate conversations about the effectiveness of SIPs can lead to better streamlining of school and district efforts, which can result in a stronger foundation for the school's future success.

Our ultimate goal is to enable schools to use the rubric to assess their current operations and performance, identify areas of strength and for improvement, retool their efforts to specifically target those areas for improvement, and then do just that: improve. Our hope is that, guided by the rubric's 12 planning domains, school leaders will plan for bold change that is critical to achieving lasting school turnaround. While this rubric is targeted toward low-performing schools engaged in short-cycle planning, it can also be used to assess traditional, year-long school improvement plans.

Creating the Rubric

To create the rubric, we engaged in a thorough review of the academic research on school improvement planning. We searched major academic databases to identify books and studies on the topic, paying particular attention to sources that specifically mentioned school improvement planning in the title, summary, or abstract. Since all recent school improvement efforts, especially those at low-performing schools, have taken place during the No Child Left Behind era, we decided to only review citations from or after 2001. This approach yielded, respectively, two books and five research studies: Duke (2015); Duke, Carr, and Sterrett (2013); Fernandez (2011); Huber and Conway (2015); Mintrop and MacLellan (2002); Mintrop, MacLellan, and Quintero (2001); and Strunk, Marsh, Bush-Mecenas, and Duque (2016).

We conducted a “crosswalk” of these six sources to identify what they assert to be the essential elements of an effective school improvement plan. After reviewing each source and discussing it in relation to our experiences with school improvement planning, we devised a preliminary set of domains with supporting evidence, which all authors then reviewed and revised together before selecting the 12 planning domains and writing their accompanying rationales. We then reviewed the rubrics found in Fernandez (2011) and Strunk et al. (2016) for organization, style, and content as we created our rubric.

We should note that the literature we referenced asserts implications for traditional (i.e., year-long) school improvement planning, as no literature on short-cycle school improvement planning presently exists. However, the basic principles of sound school improvement planning, which we based on academic research and our practical knowledge and experience, can apply to multiple school settings.

UVA/PLE has over a decade of experience working with district leader and school principal partners to develop short-cycle school improvement plans. We have observed that the content of a good plan is generally similar for both traditional and short-cycle plans. Thus, while the literature we used to devise the 12 planning domains is rooted in traditional, year-long school improvement planning, the ideas are also relevant and applicable to short-cycle school improvement planning.

Description of the 12 Rubric Planning Domains

The 12 rubric planning domains — turnaround vision, priorities, process outcomes, progress indicators, action steps, school context, root cause analysis, sequencing, schedule/timeline, alignment, responsible parties, and supports — provide school principals with a research-based guide to develop meaningful, responsive plans and district and state leaders with a way to comprehensively assess both traditional (e.g., year-long) and short-cycle (e.g., 90-day) SIPs. While the literature we used to devise the domains is rooted in traditional, year-long school improvement planning, the ideas are also relevant and applicable to short-cycle school improvement planning. In this section, we describe each of the 12 rubric planning domains and offer a rationale of inclusion for each of them.

Overarching Vision

Planning Domain 1 – Turnaround Vision

The principal leads the school leadership team and school community in urgently developing stated aims and objectives that establish how the school will be different once its turnaround is complete.

The first domain, devising an overall vision for the turnaround work, provides the substance and foundation for the next 11 domains. Clear and compelling SIPs help sustain long-term change (Duke, 2015; Fernandez, 2011; Mintrop et al., 2001), suggesting the importance of SIPs being guided by an overarching vision that specifically articulates how the school will transform. Moreover, the extent to which a clear and concise vision translates to internal stakeholders (e.g., teachers, administrators) and external stakeholders (e.g., parents, local community members) will determine, in many ways, the overall success or failure of the implementation (Mintrop & MacLellan, 2002; Silins & Mulford, 2002). Including the leadership team and school community in this early vision-development stage creates a sense of shared authority and broadens the ownership of the resulting school improvement efforts (Spillane, Parise, & Sherer, 2011).

Activities and Progress Measures

Planning Domain 2 – Priorities

The school principal identifies two to four high-leverage priorities that will help to quickly remove current barriers to change and provide the foundation for advanced work and further improvements.

While a clear and concise turnaround vision points the school in a certain direction, the avenues to realize that vision may be numerous. Priorities establish what the school needs to focus on and improve urgently. Moreover, building the foundation for future priorities may be necessary. As such, a school may need to focus on one priority at the beginning of the school improvement process in order to be able to focus on another priority down the line.

For example, by initially prioritizing the urgent need to add structure and clear outcomes to teacher collaboration meetings, a school could then focus a subsequent step on assessing and improving the quality of the outcomes of those meetings. Before the latter can happen, though, the first step must be taken.

It is essential for school leaders, faculty, and staff to discuss honestly and deeply where the school currently stands and what needs to occur in order to fulfill its vision (Fernandez, 2011; Mintrop et al., 2001). These discussions may yield many priorities for consideration, but only two to four should be selected (Duke, 2015). Focusing on too many schoolwide priorities at once can overwork the staff, causing decreases in morale and eventual burnout. Moreover, too many schoolwide priorities can dilute the overall potency of improvement efforts (Mintrop & MacLellan, 2002).

Planning Domain 3 – Process Outcomes

The results assumed once priorities are successfully addressed.

Today's political context has forced schools to become more data-driven and results oriented — and policymakers often interpret results as either the increase or decrease in student achievement on English language arts and mathematics standardized tests (Fernandez, 2011). Moreover, many schools align their SIPs with their state's accountability standards since those standards are what states use to determine whether or not a school was “successful” for a particular academic year (Mintrop & MacLellan, 2002).

However, rather than focusing on the end results (e.g., student achievement scores), process outcomes should address the underlying issues that contribute to those end results. For example, perhaps a school has a large number of students with low scores on interim math assessments, and the current schedule prevents the school's math department from engaging in common planning time. While the priority is to raise student scores on interim math assessments, a process outcome, then, could be effective common planning time for the math department. As an initial action step to accomplish this, the principal may alter the school's schedule in order to create time for the math department to meet — and once given the time to discuss and collaborate, *then* the school may be in a better position to make progress toward its priority of increasing interim math assessment scores.

In addition to priorities such as improving student achievement, schools should invest just as much energy in creating short-term process outcomes (e.g., common planning time for math teachers; Duke, 2015). The more tangible process outcomes break down the longer-term priorities and encourage schools to dig more into the nuance of what it takes to achieve a priority. Thus, a SIP should list all anticipated process outcomes and how each of those outcomes addresses identified priorities. This clarity can have positive effects on faculty morale and commitment and can increase the likelihood of success.

Planning Domain 4 – Progress Indicators

Measures that gauge progress toward improved outcomes.

Progress indicators measure the progress toward improved process outcomes (Duke, 2015; Fernandez, 2011; Mintrop & MacLellan, 2002); they are incremental checkpoints for a school to use to assess its current progress toward meeting particular outcomes (Strunk et al., 2016). These checkpoints should result in consistent self-assessment and reflection. For the example above in which effective common planning time is the process outcome, there are a number of possible progress indicators that could measure whether or not a school

is advancing toward that process outcome. For example, the school leadership team could review meeting notes both for content and quality or observe teacher instruction to identify “look fors” developed in the common meeting time being enacted effectively in classes. These progress indicators can provide leaders and faculty with formative assessments to monitor and adjust approaches in a rapid response fashion.

Planning Domain 5 – Action Steps

The list of critical, high-leverage action steps that must be taken in order to achieve a process outcome, and subsequently, a priority.

Action steps are the specific tasks the school needs to complete to meet its process outcomes and achieve its priorities (Fernandez, 2011; Mintrop & MacLellan, 2002; Strunk et al., 2016). This domain is the operationalization of the turnaround vision and associated priorities because it crystallizes the tasks that must occur for the school to achieve success (Duke, 2015). However, research suggests that many SIPs can be “overloaded with activities” and “full of minutiae” (Mintrop et al., 2001, p. 200), which renders them useless for actual progress and sustained growth. Traditional, year-long SIPs may list scores of action steps, but many may be routine tasks the school already does (Mintrop et al., 2001); those routine tasks do not demonstrate innovative thinking or original approaches to extant problems.

Accordingly, this domain suggests that if a school devises a turnaround vision that is centered on two to four priorities and built upon strong root cause analysis, action steps are likely to be much more focused and high-leverage, which maximizes the efforts of school leaders, faculty, and staff. In their SIPs, we suggest schools include fewer action steps that are high-impact instead of including many action steps that are simply routine. For instance, in the example from above, altering the school schedule to create more common planning time for math teachers might be a necessary first action step. Subsequent action steps might build on that initial action step by focusing on ways to make strategic advancements in the effectiveness of the common planning time (e.g., having an instructional coach facilitate initial meetings to grow individual and collective data-analysis skills before shifting responsibilities to a teacher leader).

Context

Planning Domain 6 – School Context

The set of circumstances, facts, and nuances to a school and within its environment that requires customization.

One prevailing assumption many policymakers and practitioners have is that reforms that are successful in one context will be successful in another, entirely different context. While this is certainly true in some cases, research has shown the pitfalls of implementing one-size-fits-all reforms without taking the time to customize various components for the particular environment (Fernandez, 2011; Mintrop & MacLellan, 2002; Strunk et al., 2016). Strategies and resources from other settings may be quite relevant and applicable to a particular school’s turnaround vision and context, but may need adaptations to complement a school’s particular context and maximize their effectiveness. For example, math teachers at two schools may be facing significant difficulties in improving numeracy instruction. The principal of one school may have deep experience crafting individualized professional development plans for his/her math teachers while another school may have a novice principal with little experience planning, much less individualizing, professional development. Consequently, the

professional development approach used in the former school will likely be quite different than the approach used in the latter school.

Planning Domain 7 – Root Cause Analysis

An approach to problem solving used for identifying foundational faults or the “why(s)” of problems.

Root cause analysis involves using data and evidence sources to identify and address the root causes of the gaps between the turnaround vision and what is presently happening within the school. For example, if an identified priority is revising mathematics instructional strategies for English language learners, root cause analysis seeks to answer why current mathematics instructional strategies hinder English language learners' mathematics performance. Root cause analysis focuses the conversation and encourages school leaders, faculty, and staff to dig deep into their current behaviors and practices (Duke et al., 2013; Fernandez, 2011; Mintrop & MacLellan, 2002).

Ineffective root cause analysis could lead a school to misidentify causes, which then leads to the creation of incorrect or superficial solutions that may not position the school to sustain change for the long term. Too often, the first corollary of the gap that leadership teams identify is deemed to be the root cause, when perhaps it is merely a link in the root cause chain, but not the actual root cause. Accordingly, it is useful to take deeper dives into the available data in order to accurately identify root causes; this can be done through activities such as completing a fishbone diagram or using other exercises that push staff to continually answer the question “Why is this the case?” until the root cause can be identified.

Organization

Planning Domain 8 – Sequencing

The arrangement of priorities, process outcomes, and action steps in particular orders.

In Domain 2, we noted two important points (1) pursuing too many priorities at one time can weaken a school's improvement efforts, and (2) some priorities need to be accomplished first so that other priorities may then be addressed. SIPs, especially short-cycle ones, encourage schools to take a deep dive into a few priorities at a time so they can devote their full attention to those critical issues at hand. However, some barriers or challenges need attention before others, so proper sequencing of priorities and ordering of process outcomes and action steps can also influence a SIP's success (Duke, 2015; Duke et al., 2013). Digging into a few high-leverage priorities with considerable effort for a shorter period of time can remove barriers to future progress as well as provide a sense of efficacy as the school moves on to the next set of priorities. Doing so can help build momentum and attract more buy-in as the change process and academic year progresses (Duke, 2015).

Planning Domain 9 – Schedule/Timeline

The schedule of critical events and procedures to be completed within the plan's designated time period.

Duke (2015) notes that a detailed schedule of critical events helps the school keep everything on track and is especially useful for school leaders since they are charged with overseeing all of the school's turnaround efforts. The schedule should establish a clear timeline of critical events that scaffolds the school's most urgent action steps to meet progress

indicators, which will, in turn, meet process outcomes, confirm or inform next steps, and ultimately achieve the listed priorities.

Planning Domain 10 – Alignment

The proper coordination or relation of the various components of the plan (e.g., priorities align with turnaround vision).

SIPs need to be internally aligned (Fernandez, 2011; Mintrop et al., 2001; Strunk et al., 2016), demonstrating coherence in how each element, from the most micro-level action step to the macro-level vision statement, is connected to and builds off each other. This is similar to the backward design approach to curriculum planning, in which all efforts work toward a final overarching goal. In a SIP's case, the school's turnaround vision is realized by accomplishing the priorities that the school identifies. In order to accomplish those priorities, the school devises a series of action steps to meet progress indicators and ultimately, process outcomes. Each action step, no matter how small, is connected to everything above it: progress indicator, process outcome, priority, and the turnaround vision.

Resources

Planning Domain 11 – Directly Responsible Individual(s)

The person or people charged with completing action steps.

It is important that each action step is associated with a particular person or group of people, which we call a “directly responsible individual” (DRI). Designating a DRI institutionalizes accountability by publicly naming the responsible person or people. Action steps are more likely to be completed when they are “owned” by a person or group of people (Fernandez, 2011; Mintrop & MacLellan, 2002; Mintrop et al., 2001), suggesting that each action step should be assigned a DRI. When action steps lack a DRI, implementation gaps may arise — and these gaps can decrease faculty and staff support, delegitimize the leadership team, and undermine broader school improvement efforts.

Principals should not be the DRI for any priority; they should work in a facilitative role that supports and holds others accountable for progress on action steps (Duke, 2015; Meyers & Hitt, 2017). Using a DRI approach has two major advantages. First, it prevents using up the leader's limited free time. Second, it helps distribute leadership of school improvement efforts across the school community and creates more opportunities for shared decision-making (Spillane et al., 2011).

Planning Domain 12 – Supports

The obtainable materials and resources (human and capital) identified as important to conduct the turnaround.

Turnaround work is often difficult and very time- and effort-intensive; rarely will schools be able to accomplish the work without other supports and resources (Fernandez, 2011; Mintrop & MacLellan, 2002; Strunk et al., 2016). Consequently, a SIP should identify the supports and resources a school can obtain that align with and help advance the school's efforts to meet progress indicators to, in turn, meet process outcomes and achieve overarching priorities. It is important that the supports and resources listed are accurate and actually available for use by the school (Duke, 2015). SIPs that purposefully leverage all that is available to them — from district personnel to federal grants — will be in stronger positions to help realize their

turnaround visions. Indeed, failing to leverage all available resources may jeopardize the school's ability to sustain long-term change.

Today's public schools face many challenges, and principals and school leadership teams, especially those in low-performing schools, have been asked to take on more than their predecessors. However, school improvement planning remains a key practice for schools to ensure their current efforts are leading them toward meeting their long-term goals and realizing the vision they have for themselves. This document and rubric provides focus for schools, districts, and SEAs to develop and assess short-cycle plans that result in contextualized, living documents that can effectively guide school improvement.

Directions for Using the School Improvement Plan Assessment Rubric

School improvement planning has become more prevalent and important due to increased calls from federal and state governments, state education agencies (SEAs), and the general public for more accountability in education. In many cases, principals are responsible for conceptualizing, drafting, and then submitting the plan. Traditional school improvement plans usually have a year-long outlook, which for high-performing schools with abundant resources could be a sound and effective practice. However, for low-performing schools facing high-stakes accountability demands, it may be more beneficial to break down this traditional year-long approach into shorter, more tangible and manageable phases. We dub this practice “short-cycle school improvement planning.” Short-cycle school improvement plans typically take a 90-day outlook, which permits schools to more frequently gauge their progress in meeting goals and realizing an overarching vision.

The School Improvement Plan Assessment Rubric

The rubric can be used to assess the quality of an existing plan or help leaders create a new plan. It is useful for school officials (e.g., principals, instructional coaches), district officials (e.g., superintendents, assistant superintendents for curriculum and instruction), and SEA officials (e.g., directors, accountability coordinators). Principals can use it to help organize their school’s improvement efforts while districts and SEAs can use the rubric to assess their schools’ school improvement plans. In addition, leaders needing to create a traditional (e.g., year-long) or short-cycle (e.g., 90-day) SIP can use the rubric as a guide and checklist. Indeed, the purpose of this rubric is to provide educators and education officials with a comprehensive, structured, and efficient way to review, assess, revise, and design school improvement plans.

The rubric lists 12 planning domains of sound school improvement plans along with a five-level scale for each domain:

- Level 0: Efforts to address the domain are “Not Present” in the plan
- Level 1: Efforts to address the domain are “Beginning”
- Level 2: Efforts to address the domain are “Developing”
- Level 3: Efforts to address the domain are “Effective”
- Level 4: Efforts to address the domain are “Exemplary”

This section provides directions on how to use the rubric to (1) review or assess an existing SIP and (2) inform the development of a new SIP. While the rubric can be used for either traditional year-long SIPs or short-cycle SIPs, it is targeted toward short-cycle planning.

Using the Rubric to Review an Existing School Improvement Plan

Regarding the review process for an existing SIP, we recommend the following:

1. Read the *Description of the 12 Rubric Planning Domains* section to gain a working understanding of each planning domain in the rubric.
2. Read the entire rubric to familiarize yourself with the 12 planning domains along with how the various levels within each planning domain differentiate progress toward “Exemplary.”
3. Read the entire SIP that you are assessing, without referring to or using the rubric.
4. Start with Planning Domain 1 and work your way to Planning Domain 12. Review the entire SIP for the elements called for within a given domain and then assess your SIP as it pertains to the given domain using the five-level scale.
5. Based on your assessment, record the level score you assigned to each domain on the *Level Tally Sheet*.
6. Using the *Level Tally Sheet*, write down any overarching thoughts and reflections.
7. Finally, write down any recommended next steps (e.g., reconsider whether the data used to identify root causes is robust enough to make the claims you do) based on your assessment of the SIP. The scores, reflections, and recommended next steps can then be leveraged as feedback and growth opportunities for those who developed the SIP.

We hope that by using this rubric to review and assess SIPs, school-, district-, and/or SEA-level officials are able to spark discussions about current school improvement efforts that will inform potential revisions to SIPs and guide schools toward setting and meeting goals that help them realize their overarching vision. Moreover, for districts and SEAs, this SIP assessment process could encourage dialogue about SIP reporting and evaluation processes and requirements, especially for low-performing schools. That is, using the rubric can provide an opportunity to consider how to move away from a SIP review process primarily focused on compliance toward a more authentic, contextualized review process focused on the logic, quality, and effectiveness of a SIP.

Throughout the SIP review process, the main focus should be centered on the following question: Based on the results of the SIP assessment, how effective is the plan in laying out clear and feasible priorities and actions to realize the school’s turnaround vision?

Using the Rubric to Create a New School Improvement Plan

To use the rubric as a reference guide when creating a new SIP, we recommend the following:

1. Read the *Description of the 12 Rubric Planning Domains* section to gain a working understanding of each planning domain in the rubric.
2. Read the entire rubric to familiarize yourself with the 12 planning domains along with how the various levels within each planning domain differentiate progress toward “Exemplary.”
3. Review the criteria for an Exemplary SIP, which is located after the *Level Tally Sheet* at the end of the rubric.

4. As you craft your SIP, start with Planning Domain 1: Turnaround Vision, as it is the most foundational, and work sequentially through the other planning domains. Pay particular attention to Planning Domain 2: Priorities and Planning Domain 7: Root Cause Analysis in order to establish priorities and engage in root cause analysis, which will help inform your development of the other planning domains.
5. Once you have finished creating a SIP, review your entire SIP for the elements called for within each given domain and refine the SIP as necessary to improve it.

Using the rubric as a reference guide and planning tool can inform SIP creation and guide schools toward setting and meeting goals that help realize their overarching vision. When developing a new SIP, the main focus should be centered on the question: How effective is the plan in articulating goals and enabling the school to realize its vision?

The School Improvement Plan Assessment Rubric

Overarching Vision

Planning Domain 1 - Turnaround Vision

The principal leads the school leadership team and school community in urgently developing stated aims and objectives that establish how the school will be different once its turnaround is complete.

Level	Explanation
<p>0 Not Present</p>	<p>The plan lacks a vision/overarching goal statement that articulates how the school will be different from how it is currently.</p>
<p>1 Beginning</p>	<p>The plan includes a vision/overarching goal statement that articulates how the school will be different once turnaround work is complete, but it is simplistic and lacks specificity and/or depth. The vision does not address the school's commitment to and passion for its turnaround work and does not appear to translate to many internal and/or external stakeholder groups (e.g., administration, faculty, students, parents, local community members).</p>
<p>2 Developing</p>	<p>The plan includes a vision/overarching goal statement that articulates how the school will be different once turnaround work is complete and addresses the school's commitment to and passion for its turnaround work. However, the latter is simplistic and lacks specificity and/or depth. The vision appears to translate to internal stakeholder groups, such as administrators and teachers, but not necessarily to students and external stakeholder groups.</p>
<p>3 Effective</p>	<p>The plan includes a coherent vision that articulates how the school will be different once turnaround work is complete and demonstrates evidence of the school's commitment to and passion for its turnaround work. The vision translates to both internal and external stakeholder groups.</p>
<p>4 Exemplary</p>	<p>The plan includes a concise, coherent, and bold vision that specifically articulates how the school will be significantly different from how it is currently once turnaround work is complete and demonstrates compelling evidence of the school's commitment to and passion for its turnaround work. The vision easily translates to both internal and external stakeholder groups, especially students.</p>

Activities and Progress Measures

Planning Domain 2 – Priorities

The school principal identifies two to four high-leverage priorities that will help to quickly remove current barriers to change and provide the foundation for advanced work and further improvements.

Level	Explanation
<p>0 Not Present</p>	<p>The plan lists no high-leverage priorities that appear to be the focus for the plan's designated time period (e.g., 90 days, 180 days).</p>
<p>1 Beginning</p>	<p>The plan lists at least one high-leverage priority that will be the focus for the plan's designated time period, but no rationale(s) for the priority/priorities is/are included.</p> <p style="text-align: center;">OR</p> <p>The plan lists too many high-leverage priorities for the plan's designated time period, making it difficult to discern the school's most pressing issues. Rationales may be provided for some priorities, but they lack depth and specificity.</p>
<p>2 Developing</p>	<p>The plan lists at least one high-leverage priority that will be the focus for the plan's designated time period. Rationale is provided for at least one priority that articulates why the priority needs urgent attention in order to realize the school's turnaround vision (i.e., the gap between what is currently occurring in the school and what the vision says should be occurring), but the rationale is not compelling and lacks specificity and/or depth.</p>
<p>3 Effective</p>	<p>The plan lists two to four high-leverage priorities that will be the focus for the plan's designated time period. A rationale is provided for each priority that articulates why the priority needs urgent attention in order to realize the school's turnaround vision (i.e., the gap between what is currently occurring in the school and what the vision says should be occurring), but one or more rationales are not compelling.</p>
<p>4 Exemplary</p>	<p>The plan lists, in specific detail, two to four high-leverage priorities that will be the focus for the plan's designated time period. A clear, compelling rationale is provided for each priority that articulates why the priority needs urgent attention in order to realize the school's turnaround vision (i.e., the gap between what is currently occurring in the school and what the vision says should be occurring).</p>

Activities and Progress Measures

Planning Domain 3 – Process Outcomes

The results assumed once priorities are successfully addressed.

Level	Explanation
<p style="text-align: center;">0 Not Present</p>	<p>The plan includes no specific process outcomes for any priority.</p>
<p style="text-align: center;">1 Beginning</p>	<p>The plan includes few specific process outcomes for each priority. Of those that are included, they may be impractical or unambitious. Nearly all process outcomes are not appropriately aligned to each priority and little to no rationale is provided to explain the relationship between each priority and its associated process outcomes.</p>
<p style="text-align: center;">2 Developing</p>	<p>The plan includes specific process outcomes for each priority, but some may be impractical based on current circumstances or not ambitious enough to realize the school's vision. Some process outcomes are appropriately aligned to each priority via rationales, but those rationales may lack persuasiveness, specificity, and/or depth.</p>
<p style="text-align: center;">3 Effective</p>	<p>The plan includes specific, feasible process outcomes for each priority that are sufficiently ambitious to help realize the school's vision. All process outcomes are appropriately aligned to each priority via rationales, but one or more rationales may still lack persuasiveness and/or depth.</p>
<p style="text-align: center;">4 Exemplary</p>	<p>The plan includes specific, feasible, and ambitious process outcomes for each priority to help realize the school's vision. Process outcomes are appropriately aligned to each priority via persuasive rationales.</p>

Activities and Progress Measures

Planning Domain 4 – Progress Indicators

Measures that gauge progress toward improved outcomes.

Level	Explanation
<p>0 Not Present</p>	<p>The plan includes no indicators that serve as incremental checkpoints to measure the school's current progress toward meeting process outcomes during the plan's designated time period.</p>
<p>1 Beginning</p>	<p>For some process outcomes, the plan includes some indicators that serve as incremental checkpoints to measure the school's current progress toward meeting those process outcomes during the plan's designated time period. Those that are included lack specificity and do not appear to be aligned with the process outcome.</p>
<p>2 Developing</p>	<p>For each process outcome, the plan includes some indicators that serve as incremental checkpoints to measure the school's current progress toward meeting those process outcomes during the plan's designated time period, but some lack specificity. Indicators are mostly aligned with process outcomes. In addition, the plan alludes to self-assessment and reflection practices, but does not specifically articulate how they will be incorporated into the school's routines.</p>
<p>3 Effective</p>	<p>For each process outcome, the plan includes a series of specific indicators that serve as incremental checkpoints to measure the school's current progress toward meeting those process outcomes during the plan's designated time period, but additional indicators would provide more opportunities for self-assessment and reflection. All indicators are aligned with all process outcomes. In addition, the plan provides evidence that self-assessment and reflection practices will be incorporated in the school's routines.</p>
<p>4 Exemplary</p>	<p>For each process outcome, the plan includes an array of specific indicators that serve as incremental checkpoints to measure the school's current progress toward meeting those process outcomes. All indicators are meaningfully and intentionally aligned with all process outcomes. In addition, self-assessment and reflection practices are meaningfully incorporated into the school's routines.</p>

Activities and Progress Measures

Planning Domain 5 – Action Steps

The list of critical, high-leverage action steps that must be taken in order to achieve a process outcome, and subsequently, a priority.

Level	Explanation
0 Not Present	The plan includes no action steps for any priorities.
1 Beginning	The plan includes few detailed, specific action steps for any process outcome. Nearly all listed action steps are routine in nature and do not demonstrate an innovative or original approach toward realizing process outcomes. Action steps appear to have little alignment with process outcomes.
2 Developing	The plan includes action steps for a majority of process outcomes, but they lack specificity and/or depth. A majority of listed action steps are routine in nature and do not demonstrate an innovative approach toward realizing process outcomes. Some, but not all, action steps are aligned with process outcomes.
3 Effective	The plan includes detailed, specific action steps for all process outcomes. Listed action steps are not routine in nature and demonstrate an innovative approach toward realizing process outcomes. All action steps are aligned with process outcomes.
4 Exemplary	The plan includes a comprehensive series of detailed, specific, and ambitious action steps for each process outcome. Listed action steps are not routine in nature and demonstrate an entirely appropriate approach toward realizing process outcomes. All action steps are intentionally aligned with and provide a logical scaffolding to realize all process outcomes.

Context

Planning Domain 6 – School Context

The set of circumstances, facts, and nuances to a school and within its environment that requires customization.

Level	Explanation
0 Not Present	The plan includes no mention of the school's context and no mention of the strengths, limitations, and needs of specific school populations (e.g., teachers, student subgroups).
1 Beginning	The plan demonstrates little understanding of the school's context and does not refer much to either the internal community (e.g., teachers, student populations) or external community (e.g., parents, local area, district). The plan includes little mention of the needs of specific student populations and subgroups.
2 Developing	The plan demonstrates some understanding of the school's context and refers to either the internal community (e.g., teachers, student populations) or external community (e.g., parents, local area, district) in some depth, but the overarching explanation lacks specificity and/or depth. Where applicable, a priority and its constituent elements allude to the needs of specific student populations and subgroups, but there is little evidence or reasoning as to how the plan specifically aids those specific student populations.
3 Effective	The plan demonstrates an understanding of the school's context, including internal community (e.g., teachers, student populations) and external community (e.g., parents, local area, district). Where applicable, a priority and its constituent elements address the needs of specific student populations and subgroups, but the explanation could be more refined and detailed on how the plan attends to their needs.
4 Exemplary	The plan demonstrates a deep understanding of the school's context, including internal community (e.g., teachers, student populations) and external community (e.g., parents, local area, district). Where applicable, a priority and its constituent elements specifically address and attend to the needs of specific student populations and subgroups.

Context

Planning Domain 7 – Root Cause Analysis

An approach to problem solving used for identifying foundational faults or the “why(s)” of problems.

Level	Explanation
<p>0 Not Present</p>	<p>The plan makes no attempt to use appropriate data sources and evidence to identify and articulate the root causes for each priority.</p>
<p>1 Beginning</p>	<p>The plan makes little attempt to use appropriate data sources and evidence to identify and articulate the root causes for each priority. Of the root cause analysis that is included, it significantly lacks depth and/or specificity. The plan does not include any linkage between each priority’s rationale and its root causes.</p>
<p>2 Developing</p>	<p>The plan makes an attempt to use appropriate data sources and evidence to identify and articulate the root causes for each priority, but the root cause analysis lacks some depth and/or specificity. The plan hints at linkages between each priority’s rationale and its root causes, but they are not stated explicitly.</p>
<p>3 Effective</p>	<p>The plan uses appropriate data sources and evidence to articulate the root causes for each priority and refers to linkages between each priority’s rationale and its root causes, but those linkages may lack the depth and/or specificity necessary to be easy to comprehend.</p>
<p>4 Exemplary</p>	<p>The plan uses a diverse array of appropriate data sources and evidence to articulate, in specific detail, the root causes for each priority and includes a detailed explanation of the linkages between each priority’s rationale and its root causes. The linkages are easy to comprehend and logically and succinctly explain the root causes of each priority.</p>

Organization

Planning Domain 8 - Sequencing

The arrangement of priorities, process outcomes, and action steps in particular orders.

Level	Explanation
<p>0 Not Present</p>	<p>The plan includes no real sequencing of priorities, process outcomes, and action steps.</p>
<p>1 Beginning</p>	<p>The plan includes priorities, process outcomes, and action steps that appear to be in some type of sequence, but no rationale for sequencing is provided to discern if the priorities, process outcomes, and action steps need to occur in a certain order. The sequencing that is included is illogical and unintentional.</p>
<p>2 Developing</p>	<p>The plan includes some semblance of a sequencing of priorities, process outcomes, and action steps along with a vague rationale for the sequencing. The sequencing appears to be somewhat illogical and/or unintentional, as one or more action step(s) do not appear to be ordered in an entirely logical or intentional way that would help realize process outcomes and the vision.</p>
<p>3 Effective</p>	<p>The plan includes a sequencing of priorities, process outcomes, and action steps that is logical and intentional, but the included rationale for the sequencing could include more specificity and/or depth to justify how the order of action steps helps realize process outcomes and, subsequently, the priorities and vision.</p>
<p>4 Exemplary</p>	<p>The plan includes a sequencing of priorities, process outcomes, and action steps that is logical and intentional, building the necessary support and momentum to help realize process outcomes, priorities, and the vision. The plan also includes a persuasive, comprehensive rationale for the sequencing. One or more future priorities, process outcomes, and/or action steps may be listed within the plan to help project a longer-term vision, providing further support for the plan's current sequencing.</p>

Organization

Planning Domain 9 - Schedule/Timeline

The schedule of critical events and procedures to be completed within the plan's designated time period.

Level	Explanation
<p>0 Not Present</p>	<p>The plan does not include any schedule/timeline of events and procedures to be completed during the plan's designated time period.</p>
<p>1 Beginning</p>	<p>The plan includes an overview of a schedule/timeline of events and procedures to be completed during the plan's designated time period, but there is not much specificity and/or detail.</p>
<p>2 Developing</p>	<p>The plan includes a broad, but vague schedule/timeline of events and procedures to be completed during the plan's designated time period. Some clear times are included that demonstrate how the school will meet progress indicators aligned with process outcomes that then meet priorities and, finally, help realize the vision.</p>
<p>3 Effective</p>	<p>The plan includes a schedule/timeline of events and procedures to be completed during the plan's designated time period. The plan provides evidence of clear times that show how the school will meet progress indicators aligned with process outcomes that then meet priorities and, finally, help realize the vision.</p>
<p>4 Exemplary</p>	<p>The plan includes a detailed, comprehensive schedule/timeline of events and procedures to be completed during the plan's designated time period. The plan provides detailed, comprehensive evidence of clear times that show how the school will meet progress indicators aligned with process outcomes that then meet priorities and, finally, help realize the vision.</p>

Organization

Planning Domain 10 – Alignment

The proper coordination or relation of the various components of the plan (e.g., priorities align with the turnaround vision).

Level	Explanation
<p>0 Not Present</p>	<p>The plan demonstrates no internal alignment of relevant areas of the plan — such as the priorities, school context, process outcomes, and action steps — to the school's overarching turnaround vision.</p>
<p>1 Beginning</p>	<p>The plan demonstrates little internal alignment of relevant areas of the plan — such as the priorities, school context, process outcomes, and action steps — to the school's overarching turnaround vision. No rationale for alignment is provided, and there is no mention of the district's turnaround vision (or lack thereof).</p>
<p>2 Developing</p>	<p>The plan demonstrates some internal alignment of relevant areas of the plan — such as the priorities, school context, process outcomes, and action steps — to the school's overarching turnaround vision. Some rationale for alignment is provided, but it lacks specificity and/or depth. There is some reference to the district's turnaround vision (or lack thereof), but it is not discussed in depth and/or in relation to the school's turnaround vision.</p>
<p>3 Effective</p>	<p>The plan demonstrates internal alignment of relevant areas of the plan — such as the priorities, school context, process outcomes, and action steps — to the school's overarching turnaround vision. A rationale for alignment is provided, and there is a mention of the school's turnaround vision in relation to the district's turnaround vision (or lack thereof).</p>
<p>4 Exemplary</p>	<p>The plan demonstrates comprehensive internal alignment of all relevant areas of the plan — such as the priorities, school context, process outcomes, and action steps — to the school's overarching turnaround vision. A detailed rationale for alignment is provided, and there is a detailed mention of the school's turnaround vision in relation to the district's turnaround vision (or lack thereof).</p>

Resources

Planning Domain 11 – Directly Responsible Individual(s)

The person or people charged with completing action steps.

Level	Explanation
<p>0 Not Present</p>	<p>No responsible parties are listed for any action steps.</p>
<p>1 Beginning</p>	<p>Responsible parties are listed for a few action steps, but not many. The principal appears to be the person leading at least a majority of priorities, but the distribution of responsibilities for plan implementation and evaluation is unclear.</p>
<p>2 Developing</p>	<p>Responsible parties are listed for most action steps. The distribution of action steps to responsible parties is not varied, and is concentrated around only a few people within the school, including the principal. The principal is the responsible party for at least one priority.</p>
<p>3 Effective</p>	<p>Responsible parties are listed for nearly all action steps. The distribution of action steps to responsible parties is varied, but still somewhat concentrated around a few people and/or groups. The principal is not the responsible party for any priority.</p>
<p>4 Exemplary</p>	<p>Responsible parties are listed for each action step. The distribution of action steps to responsible parties is varied and not concentrated around a few people and/or groups.</p>

Resources

Planning Domain 12 – Supports

The obtainable materials and resources (human and capital) identified as important to conduct the turnaround.

Level	Explanation
<p>0 Not Present</p>	<p>The plan includes no mention of obtainable supports that align with and help conduct the turnaround work.</p>
<p>1 Beginning</p>	<p>The plan includes little mention of obtainable supports that align with and help conduct the turnaround work. For obtainable supports that are mentioned, little detail about their relevance to the turnaround process is included in the plan.</p> <p style="text-align: center;">OR</p> <p>If no obtainable supports are available to conduct turnaround work, the plan lacks any explanation as to why.</p>
<p>2 Developing</p>	<p>The plan identifies some obtainable supports that align with and help conduct the turnaround work and offers some detail on how those supports will be incorporated to help realize the vision. However, the plan does not really articulate how those supports advance the achievement of priorities.</p> <p style="text-align: center;">OR</p> <p>If no obtainable supports are available to conduct turnaround work, the plan includes some detail as to why, but the explanation lacks specificity and/or depth.</p>
<p>3 Effective</p>	<p>The plan identifies obtainable supports that align with and help conduct the turnaround work and offers sufficient detail on how those supports will be incorporated to help realize the vision. The explanation could include more specificity to be exemplary.</p> <p style="text-align: center;">OR</p> <p>If no obtainable supports are available to conduct turnaround work, the plan includes specific rationale and accompanying detail as to why.</p>
<p>4 Exemplary</p>	<p>The plan intentionally identifies obtainable supports that align with and help conduct the turnaround work and offers comprehensive detail on how those supports will be incorporated to help realize the vision. The explanation succinctly summarizes and justifies the use of obtainable supports.</p> <p style="text-align: center;">OR</p> <p>If no obtainable supports are available to conduct turnaround work, the plan includes a specific mention as to why, along with how, the school will engage in continuous environmental scanning to identify future obtainable supports.</p>

School Improvement Plan Assessment Rubric: Level Tally Sheet

Planning Domain	Level (0 to 4)
Planning Domain 1: Turnaround Vision	
Planning Domain 2: Priorities	
Planning Domain 3: Process Outcomes	
Planning Domain 4: Progress Indicators	
Planning Domain 5: Action Steps	
Planning Domain 6: School Context	
Planning Domain 7: Root Cause Analysis	
Planning Domain 8: Sequencing	
Planning Domain 9: Schedule/Timeline	
Planning Domain 10: Alignment	
Planning Domain 11: Directly Responsible Individual(s)	
Planning Domain 12: Supports	

Overarching Thoughts and Reflections:

Recommended Next Steps:

1.

2.

3.

4.

School Improvement Plan Assessment Rubric: Criteria for an Exemplary SIP

Planning Domain	Level 4 “Exemplary” Explanation
Overarching Vision	
1. Turnaround Vision	The plan includes a concise, coherent, and bold vision that specifically articulates how the school will be significantly different from how it is currently once turnaround work is complete and demonstrates compelling evidence of the school’s commitment to and passion for its turnaround work. The vision easily translates to both internal and external stakeholder groups, especially students.
Activities and Progress Measures	
2. Priorities	The plan lists, in specific detail, two to four high-leverage priorities that will be the focus for the plan’s designated time period. A clear, compelling rationale is provided for each priority that articulates why the priority needs urgent attention in order to realize the school’s turnaround vision (i.e., the gap between what is currently occurring in the school and what the vision says should be occurring).
3. Process Outcomes	The plan includes specific, feasible, and ambitious process outcomes for each priority to help realize the school’s vision. Process outcomes are appropriately aligned to each priority via persuasive rationales.
4. Progress Indicators	For each process outcome, the plan includes an array of specific indicators that serve as incremental checkpoints to measure the school’s current progress toward meeting those process outcomes. All indicators are meaningfully and intentionally aligned with all process outcomes. In addition, self-assessment and reflection practices are meaningfully incorporated into the school’s routines.
5. Action Steps	The plan includes a comprehensive series of detailed, specific, and ambitious action steps for each process outcome. Listed action steps are not routine in nature and demonstrate an entirely appropriate approach toward realizing process outcomes. All action steps are intentionally aligned with and provide a logical scaffolding to realize all process outcomes.
Context	
6. School Context	The plan demonstrates a deep understanding of the school’s context, including internal community (e.g., teachers, student populations) and external community (e.g., parents, local area, district). Where applicable, a priority and its constituent elements specifically address and attend to the needs of specific student populations and subgroups.

School Improvement Plan Assessment Rubric: Criteria for an Exemplary SIP *(continued)*

Planning Domain	Level 4 “Exemplary” Explanation
7. Root Cause Analysis	The plan uses a diverse array of appropriate data sources and evidence to articulate, in specific detail, the root causes for each priority and includes a detailed explanation of the linkages between each priority’s rationale and its root causes. The linkages are easy to comprehend and logically and succinctly explain the root causes of each priority.
Organization	
8. Sequencing	The plan includes a sequencing of priorities, process outcomes, and action steps that is logical and intentional, building the necessary support and momentum to help realize process outcomes, priorities, and the vision. The plan also includes a persuasive, comprehensive rationale for the sequencing. One or more future priorities, process outcomes, and/or action steps may be listed within the plan to help project a longer-term vision, providing further support for the plan’s current sequencing.
9. Schedule/Timeline	The plan includes a detailed, comprehensive schedule/timeline of events and procedures to be completed during the plan’s designated time period. The plan provides detailed, comprehensive evidence of clear times that show how the school will meet progress indicators aligned with process outcomes that then meet priorities and, finally, help realize the vision.
10. Alignment	The plan demonstrates comprehensive internal alignment of all relevant areas of the plan — such as the priorities, school context, process outcomes, and action steps — to the school’s overarching turnaround vision. A detailed rationale for alignment is provided, and there is a detailed mention of the school’s turnaround vision in relation to the district’s turnaround vision (or lack thereof).
Resources	
11. Directly Responsible Individual(s)	Responsible parties are listed for each action step. The distribution of action steps to responsible parties is varied and not concentrated around a few people and/or groups.
12. Supports	<p>The plan intentionally identifies obtainable supports that align with and help conduct the turnaround work and offers comprehensive detail on how those supports will be incorporated to help realize the vision. The explanation succinctly summarizes and justifies the use of obtainable supports.</p> <p style="text-align: center;">OR</p> <p>If no obtainable supports are available to conduct turnaround work, the plan includes a specific mention as to why, along with how, the school will engage in continuous environmental scanning to identify future obtainable supports.</p>

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A RUBRIC FOR ASSESSING SCHOOLS' PLANS FOR RAPID IMPROVEMENT