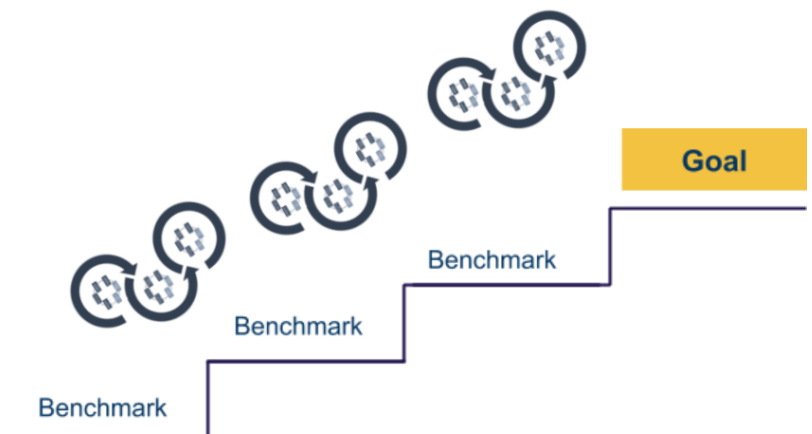
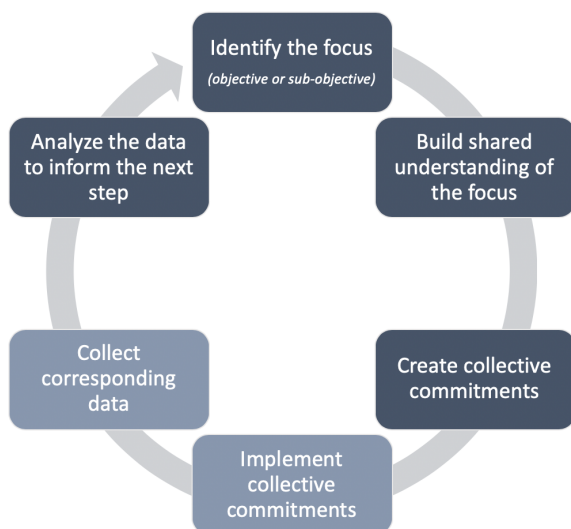


ACE ACADEMIES

Cycles of Improvement - “Learning together is the work.”

We believe that we are made for each other in the image and likeness of God. As St. Paul reminds us, we are called to fan into flame the gifts that God gifted each of us. Therefore, we embrace as our vocation a collective responsibility for each other’s success. Because skillful teaching drives student achievement, we prioritize adult learning. NDAA leaders recognize that they have a sacred responsibility to build teacher capacity so that all teachers can successfully meet teaching and learning expectations. As such, NDAA leaders set ambitious goals and then prioritize adult learning and coaching to enact continuous cycles of improvement to achieve their goals.

Adult learning is backward-designed from annual goals in the form of an articulated scope and sequence. The scope and sequence delineates key benchmarks for adult learning throughout the year. In a culture for learning, school leaders focus on mastery of skillful practice rather than coverage. A collaborative cycle of improvement is a sustained approach to developing the collective capacity of teachers. It not only supports adult formation, but does so in a manner that intentionally invites teacher voice and engagement in the process and embeds formative checks on uptake of new learning,



Identify the Focus

“What distinguished effective from ineffective organizational change was the attention given to translating those goals into the specific behaviors needed to achieve them.” (DuFour & Fullan)

The focus will be determined by the articulated scope and sequence as well as ongoing data collection from previous cycles. What is the focus for adult capacity-building? What new knowledge and skills do teachers need to best meet the needs of students?

Build Shared Understanding of the Focus

“For every increment of performance I demand from you, I have an equal responsibility to provide you with the capacity to meet that expectation.” (Elmore, 2002)

We cannot expect our way to excellence. A fundamental task of leadership is to create the conditions to ensure teachers have the resources, time, space, and processes in place to gradually acquire the skills and knowledge required to meet their students’ needs.

Each adult capacity-building session should include:

- Building or revisiting the rationale (why is this important to us and to our students?)
 - Knowledge and skill development
 - A carefully planned process for ensuring capacity is built (materials, protocol with timings)
-

Create Collective Commitments

“Without involvement, there is no commitment.”

When teachers are involved in articulating the specific commitments for implementation of new learning, they are more committed, and therefore more likely to be successful. Adult capacity-building sessions are most powerful when they end in everyone publically committing to next steps, including the leadership team.

Implement Collective Commitments

“In leading systemic change, leaders must not confuse declarations of intent with purposeful actions.”

The best way to build momentum and buy-in is to “engineer hope” by enacting intentions. Follow-through in the cycles is critical to foster efficacy and commitment. Ensure teachers have what they need to implement the changes and calendar observations (if specific times and content areas are targeted).

Collective and Analyze Corresponding Data

“Frequent, brief visits focused on specific “look-fors” provide information about what’s working, or not working.”

“One of the most consistent finding of those who have examined how systems and organizations sustain continuous improvement comes down to this: proactively create, identify, and celebrate small wins”

Just as is in the classroom, what matters is whether they learned it, not whether we taught it. Leadership teams should agree upon a set of clearly defined criteria of success or look-fors associated with each adult learning focus. These can be organized into a simple rubric or checklist to guide walkthroughs. Leadership teams can then get a schoolwide snapshot that helps identify trends in uptake - what stuck from the learning and what didn't?

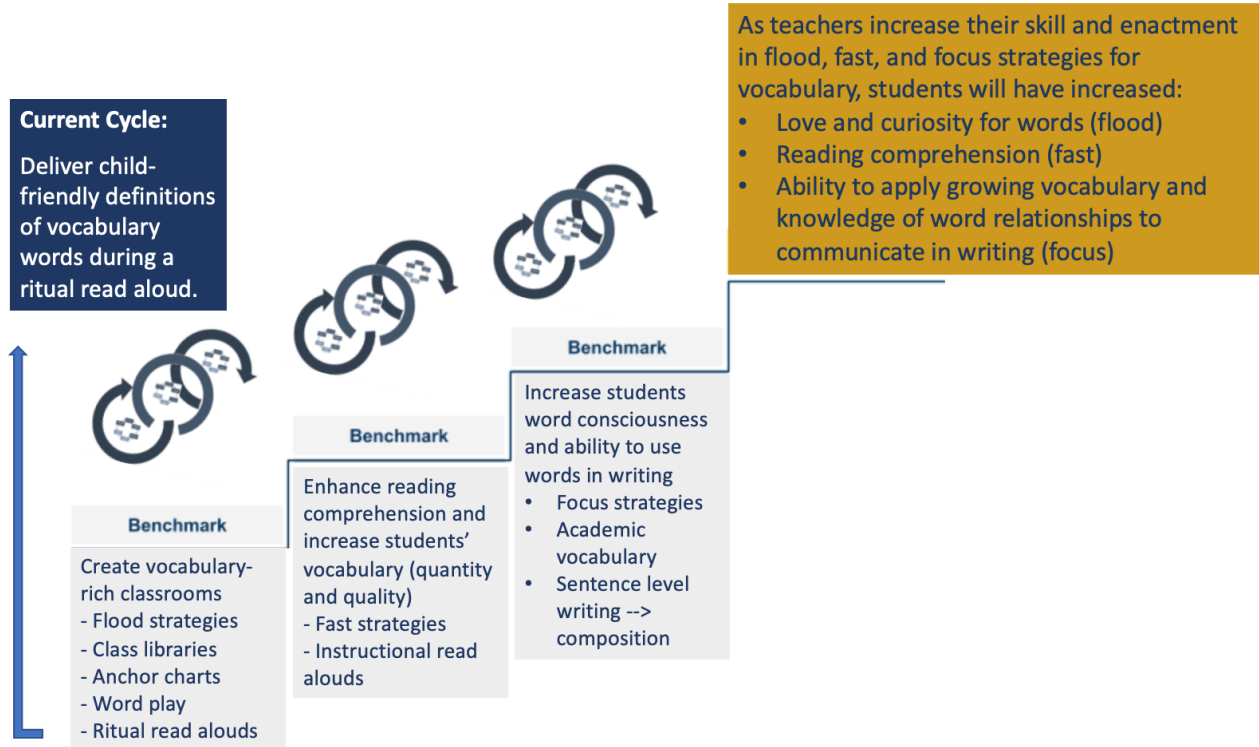
In analysis, identify whether teacher practice meets an MTSS threshold (75-80% effective implementation) for moving forward with the scope and sequence. Find a celebration and plan to communicate it to teachers. Identify outliers in need of more support or ready for a stretch. Surface any criteria that haven't met the threshold and therefore need to be the next focus. Be open to learning about unanticipated needs that need to be addressed before moving to the next benchmark.



Additional Resources

Sample Cycles within Goal Progression

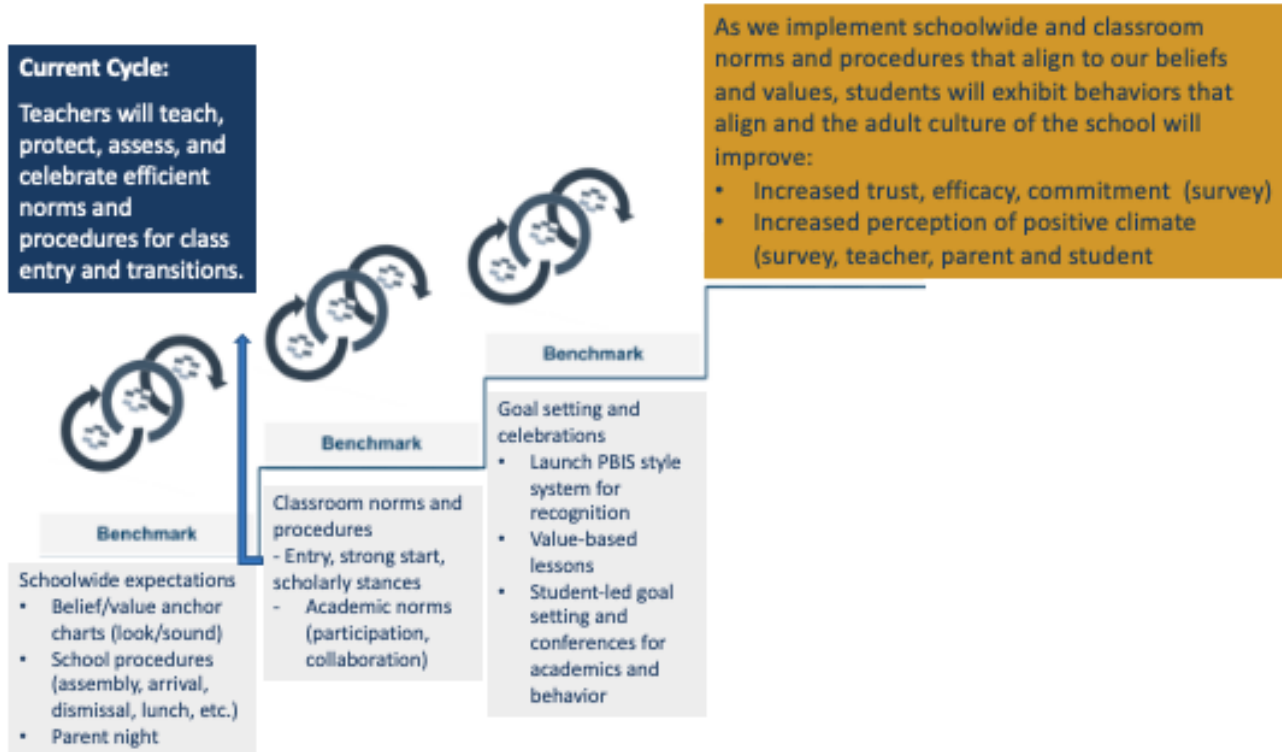
- Vocabulary-Focused Teaching and Learning Goal**



- Writing-Focused Teaching and Learning Goal**



- *Value- and Belief-Aligned Behavior School Culture Goal*



Articles and Research

Birenbaum, M., Kimron, H., Shilton, H., & Shahaf-Barzilay, R. (2009). Cycles of inquiry: Formative assessment in service of learning in classrooms and in school-based professional communities. *Studies in Educational Evaluation*, 35(4), 130-149.

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Copland, M. A. (2003). Leadership of inquiry: Building and sustaining capacity for school improvement. *Educational Evaluation and Policy Analysis*, 25(4).

Mitra, D. (2003). The cycle of inquiry as the engine of school reform: Lessons from the Bay Area School Reform.

Nordengren, C., & Guskey, T.R. (2020) Chart a clear course

Schmoker, M. (2004). Tipping point: From feckless reform to substantive instructional improvement. *Phi Delta Kappan*, 85(6), 424-432.