

Indistar®
Pacing the Work with Indicators
A Guide for Setting State Expectations
Center on Innovation & Improvement

Indistar® states include in their systems between 20 and 40 district indicators and between 80 and 100 school indicators. Since the school list is more extensive, let's consider how the work of a school Leadership Team might be paced to cover all of these indicators in a reasonable amount of time. We will base our calculations on 90 school indicators, the mid-range among states.

The goal, of course, is for each indicator to be fully implemented. The Leadership Team may determine that an indicator is being fully implemented at two points in the system: (1) When the indicator is first assessed; or (2) After a plan has been completed to reach full implementation of the indicator (called an "objective" in the plan).

Assessing the Indicators

For our example, let's assume that 20% of the indicators are known to be fully implemented at the time they are first assessed. That 20% of indicators, then, are not included in the plan. They will be re-assessed in two or three years (as determined by the state) when the system flags them for reassessment.

When an indicator is initially assessed as "fully implemented," the team simply marks it as fully implemented and provides a paragraph to describe how it knows it is fully implemented—the evidence. The evidence relates directly and literally to this one indicator, nothing more. The evidence never says "we will," because that means the evidence is not yet in hand. "We will" is a statement that is appropriate as a task in the plan.

With 90 indicators, we will assume that 18 will be determined "fully implemented" at the first assessment. To discuss one indicator and develop the evidence statement may take, on average, 15 minutes. So 4 ½ hours of meeting time.

When an indicator is assessed as No Development or Implementation, the Leadership Team determines whether it is of sufficient priority and interest to include in the plan. Nearly always, the answer is Yes. When the answer is Yes, the system asks the same questions that are asked if the indicator is assessed as Limited Development or Implementation: (1) What is the priority level and opportunity level for this indicator? (a way to prioritize which objectives are tackled first in the planning step in order to gain "quick wins."); (2) How does the implementation look now? (a simple statement in a sentence or two); and (3) By what date should the objective be met? Again, this assessment process takes about 15 minutes for each indicator. Seventy-two indicators assessed at 15 minutes each—18 hours. Wow! This is taking some time. That is why we need to realistically pace the work.

Planning the Indicators

Seventy-two indicators to plan, and plans often evolve over time. In other words, a few tasks may be created to meet an objective at first, but later more tasks added if the objective is not being met. What needs to be done (simple, practical steps likely to reach full implementation)? These are tasks, and each task is assigned to someone (anyone in the school) to complete, and a target date established. Let's assume it takes 15 minutes to create tasks for an objective. Ready for this? Another 18 hours for planning.

Monitoring Progress

The Leadership Team monitors progress by simply checking off tasks that have been completed. When all of the tasks for an objective are completed, the system asks if the objective has been met. If it has, then the team shows its evidence. If the objective has not been met, the team is instructed to add more tasks. Checking progress in task completion may take five minutes for each objective. Seventy-two objectives—6 hours. Providing the evidence may take another 10 minutes—12 hours. This is mounting up, isn't it? Another 18 hours of task checking and evidence writing.

Reality Check

The total Leadership Team time to assess, plan, and monitor the progress of 90 indicators is estimated at 40.5 hours. That's a full week's work, spread over two or three years, or 14 to 20 hours a year (rounding the numbers now). That doesn't seem quite so daunting. If the Leadership Team meets for two hours a month, that is a manageable expectation.

Pacing the Work

So, should all the indicators be first assessed, and then all planned? Or should they be assessed and planned together in chunks? If they are all assessed at once, that would take a year. Then planning would take another year, and probably two years since the planning and progress monitoring take place simultaneously—as soon as tasks are set, the implementation work begins. It makes more sense, then, to assess and plan in chunks. That's where the state provides guidance by benchmarking how many indicators should be addressed at different points in time and showing the order in which they should be considered.

The teaming and leadership indicators are foundational—necessary before instructional planning and classroom delivery can really be addressed. States typically ask schools to work on the teaming and leadership indicators first, then instructional planning, and then classroom delivery.

In a three-year cycle, the pace would be to assess, plan, and monitor progress on about 25 indicators each year (rounding again). That is a comfortable pace. A two-year cycle is possible, with about 36 indicators a year. Still doable, but more challenging. Still, some schools seek rapid improvement.

The Good News

The good news is that the assessing, planning, and monitoring becomes less onerous after one cycle through the indicators. Why? Because when the indicators are re-assessed, most should be still fully implemented and not requiring further planning and monitoring. Just those feisty indicators are addressed now—the ones that slip away when our backs are turned and require more tasks to get back on track.

Continuous Improvement

Continuous improvement is, well, continuous. But the initial work is the most demanding—arriving at a good assessment of all the indicators of effective practice and working hard to bring them to full implementation. Sustaining the good work is important, and also continuous. The Leadership Team is “working on the work,” and that is part of the work. It is also invigorating, important, and professional work that might also be called “professional development.” The Leadership Team, and everyone in the school, learns a great deal by focusing on indicators of effective practice.

Questions for the State to Answer

1. **Cycle.** What is preferred—a 3-year or 2-year initial cycle? After that, the system will flag each indicator when it has been two or three years since it was last determined to be fully implemented.
2. **Benchmarks.** In what order should the indicators be assessed and planned? With 25 or 36 per year, where is it best for the Leadership Team to start? A benchmark is set for the chunk of indicators to be assessed and planned by a certain date.
3. **Reporting Dates.** When should the Leadership Team report its progress? The reporting dates should correspond with the benchmarks. Reporting only requires the principal to hit the Submit button. A snapshot of the work to date is taken by the system and sent as a report to the state. Two or three reporting dates are usually established for each year.