Creating READIness

Closing Achievement Gaps by Designing School Improvement Programs to Succeed in Underserved Schools

Center on GREAT TEACHERS & LEADERS at the American Institutes for Research®

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The Need Paradox

The underserved schools that need access to improvement programs the most are the schools where these programs are least likely to be implemented rigorously, if at all.

- **Who experiences it?** The need paradox is particularly true for schools designated as low performing, such as Comprehensive School Improvement (CSI) or Targeted School Improvement (TSI) schools.
- **What are common challenges?** Low-performing schools often face multiple challenges simultaneously; however, common challenges include poor leadership and infrastructure, inadequately prepared educators, and accountability pressures, which together can exacerbate already high teacher attrition rates.[1]

[1] Darling-Hammond, L. (2010). Recruiting and retaining teachers: Turning around the race to the bottom in high-need schools. *Journal of Curriculum and Instruction, 4*(1), 16–32; Goldhaber, D., Lavery, L., & Theobald, R. (2015). Uneven playing field? Assessing the teacher quality gap between advantaged and disadvantaged students. *Educational Researcher, 44*(5), 293–307. Isenberg, E., Max, J., Gleason, P., Johnson, M., Deutsch, J., & Hansen, M. (2016). *Do low-income students have equal access to effective teachers? Evidence from 26 districts.* Chicago, IL: Mathematica Policy Research. Sass, T. R., Hannaway, J., Xu, Z., Figlio, D. N., & Feng, L. (2012). Value added of teachers in high-poverty schools and lower poverty schools. *Journal of Urban Economics, 72*(2–3), 104–122.

Current Paradigm

Schools

In the past, states and districts often viewed underserved schools as lacking readiness for statewide or districtwide initiatives. This perspective may inadvertently widen achievement gaps by excluding the schools most in need of access to rigorous, well-designed programs.

State- and district-supported school improvement and teacher quality programs can be designed and implemented in ways that promote the necessary readiness among high-need schools. To do this, programs must take into account the characteristics of high-need schools in order to strengthen school readiness through additional targeted support and resources.

GTL Center READIness Paradigm

Programs

Instead of viewing readiness as a mechanism to sort schools out of programs, states and districts should flip their focus and define readiness by assessing how well the improvement program is designed to target the specific needs of underserved schools.

- Need is constant, but readiness may depend on the design of the program.
- Just like schools should be ready for their highest need students, programs should be ready for their highest need schools, not the other way around.

READI Framework in Action

The READI Framework is based on our collaboration with a variety of state and district leaders. One such example is the GTL Center's partnership with the Indiana Department of Education and Kokomo School Corporation. Using the GTL Center's Mentoring and Induction Toolkit 2.0, the team facilitated a data dive, root-cause analysis, induction program inventory, and action planning. These initial steps revealed that schools most in need of a new mentoring and induction program were high-need elementary schools where teachers required additional supports focused on classroom management and understanding student needs. With the support of the GTL Center, the Kokomo School Corporation built their mentoring and induction program with that focus in mind, targeting support and addressing resource deficiencies in the schools. They developed a new process for mentor selection, created professional learning opportunities for mentors to build their capacity, and targeted the induction program for new teachers in those four schools. By the end of the first year, pilot schools saw teacher retention jump from 50% to 100%. With support from Indiana Department of Education, the program and resources have been scaled up to more schools in the district and to new districts.

The READI Framework | Does Your Program...

Address...	**R**esource Deficiencies
Target...	**E**ducator Supports
Consider...	**A**ccountability Requirements
Counteract...	**D**isparities in Working Conditions
Build...	**I**mplementation Capacity of Staff

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Visit the GTL Center at www.gtlcenter.org/readi

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