

A Vision for School Improvement: Applying the *Framework for Great Schools*

Every day, we work together to ensure that all our students will be ready for the next stage of their education and, ultimately, for college, a career, and a future as a productive adult. Our Chancellor’s vision for achieving this success for all students is summarized in our *Framework for Great Schools* (the *Framework*). Until all our students are on track to succeed, our work must be centered on school improvement through continuous learning. To do this well, we must have the courage to address problems, make adjustments, and create solutions, as well as take time to reflect and revise our thinking. The *Framework* recognizes and validates the highly complex work of schools by describing the **interplay** of six essential elements of improving schools: rigorous instruction, supportive environment, collaborative teachers, effective school leadership, strong family-community ties, and — necessary for growth in any of the elements — trust.

Education research tells us schools that significantly improve advance their practice in all six elements. We also know schools improve by taking a **disciplined and active approach** to regular cycles of learning to solve authentic problems of practice. This document provides guidance for schools to address the *Framework* elements through ongoing cycles that improve teaching and learning and, ultimately, outcomes for our students.



A cycle of learning is the process of applying the scientific method to everyday work in schools:

1. What is the specific problem I am trying to solve?
2. What change might I introduce and why?
3. How will I know whether the change is actually an improvement?

Questions from Bryk et al., *Learning to Improve*, p. 9

RATIONALE

When the [Common Core Learning Standards](#), the [Advance](#) system for teacher development and evaluation, the special education reform initiative's [A Shared Path to Success](#), and the New York City Department of Education (NYCDOE)'s [Academic and Personal Behaviors](#) were new to our system, the [Citywide Instructional Expectations](#) articulated shared steps for all schools to make sense of these initiatives and shift practice. Schools found that having a guidance document from the NYCDOE was [helpful](#) as we moved from making early attempts to engaging routinely with these practices. This document continues the guidance previously provided in the [Citywide Instructional Expectations](#).

Now, through the *Framework for Great Schools* and [the research of Dr. Anthony Bryk](#), we are reminded that our work must encompass the full complexity of our schools and the interaction among the six essential elements. While each element of the *Framework* is a unique ingredient for school success, the impact on student learning is strongest when all elements are connected throughout the school community. By working collaboratively to make sense of how the *Framework* can support continuous improvement, we will learn as a City what works best for each individual school.

Schools that continuously improve do two things well: [they explore new strategies](#), [welcoming mistakes as learning opportunities](#), and they [integrate new approaches within the ongoing work of their schools](#), [honoring and building from prior work](#). To support these practices, this year's guidance once again focuses on schools owning their learning and continuing with successful approaches as they work to ensure the success of all learners. In particular, building on prior work across New York City, this guidance emphasizes integrating the *Framework* into existing cycles of learning because engaging in this process is [how schools improve best](#).

Importantly, this guidance is a resource to support schools in owning their learning and change process, not a new accountability measure.

This document highlights:

- A [process](#) for applying the *Framework for Great Schools* within each school's context by embedding it into existing cycles of learning
- [Connections](#) among the vision laid out in the *Framework*, a process for improvement, and existing New York City Department of Education [measures](#)
- Links to supporting [resources](#)

- Clearly articulated steps for school communities to integrate new learning over time
- A resource that draws connections among key initiatives
- Common language across roles and schools
- A citywide approach that supports open dialogue and sharing of continuous learning experiences

***“It’s not new;
it’s about being
purposeful. We can do
this work better and
the Framework can
help us.”***

— NYCDOE PRINCIPAL

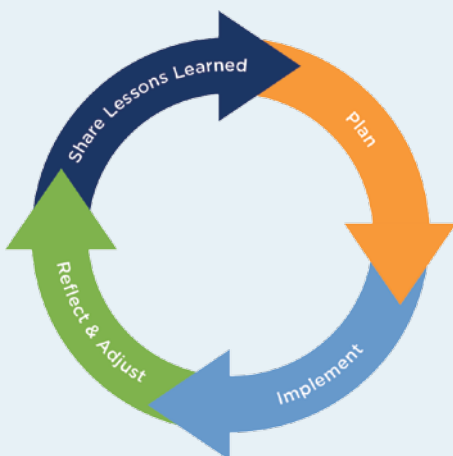
As a community, develop a shared understanding of the *Framework for Great Schools*



Assess needs and establish goals



Engage in cycles of learning



A PROCESS FOR APPLYING THE *FRAMEWORK*

In 2015–16, schools should use the *Framework* to strengthen their approach to priority areas of work. Although the process described below is not a strict recipe and may look different depending on your school’s unique context, the main tenets are the same.

1 As a community, develop a shared understanding of the *Framework for Great Schools*.

To learn together, a community begins by developing a common understanding of the work.

- In small-group and whole-group conversations, discuss how each of the *Framework*’s six elements and the overall *Framework* support student learning.
- Use your weekly professional development and family engagement time to support structured conversations across your school community (find [resources here](#)).

2 Assess needs and establish goals.

Every year, each school community engages in a comprehensive [needs assessment](#) and goal-setting process. As you consider the key areas for improvement in your students’ learning, apply the *Framework* to ensure that, across your goals, you consider all six elements.

- As a community, assess your school’s capacity to impact student achievement for all learners, including English language learners and students with disabilities, in each element of the *Framework* by looking at relevant data trends from [NYCDOE measures](#) as well as your knowledge of your students, staff, and community. Determine areas of strength upon which you can build as well as areas for growth.
- Then, collaboratively agree on two to five goals for 2015–16 that

address the *Framework* holistically. High-impact goals will span more than one element. Consider how you might build from elements of strength to address elements in development. Use a goal-setting process that works for your school community. You can set goals once by using the same goals in your [CEP](#) and aligning them to [Quality Review](#) indicator 3.1 (goals and action plans). Goals represent the priority work of the year and include your schoolwide [instructional focus](#).

3 Engage in cycles of learning.

As in the past, address your goals through cycles of learning. Whether your community thinks about its iterative learning process as collaborative inquiry, action research, problems of practice, the *Handbook for Professional Learning*'s professional learning cycles, or [Quality Review](#) indicator 5.1 (monitoring and revising), this year you should use the *Framework* as part of that process to ensure you are addressing all elements of school success.

SUGGESTED TIMELINE FOR SCHOOLS

SPRING 2015

- Develop a shared understanding of the *Framework for Great Schools*.
- Assess needs and establish goals, including a schoolwide instructional focus.

SUMMER 2015

- Continue to develop a shared understanding of the *Framework for Great Schools*.
- Refine goals, beginning to identify the specific problems you will aim to solve through cycles of learning.

FALL 2015

- Refine goals, finalizing the specific problems you will aim to solve through cycles of learning.
- Engage in cycles of learning (plan, implement, reflect and adjust, share lessons learned).

WINTER 2016

- Engage in cycles of learning (plan, implement, reflect and adjust, share lessons learned).

SPRING 2016

- Engage in cycles of learning (plan, implement, reflect and adjust, share lessons learned).
- Assess needs and establish or revise goals for next school year.



CYCLE OF LEARNING

Plan

- For each goal identified, collaboratively define a specific problem you will aim to solve, investigate root causes, and identify a change to try that targets an aspect of the problem. Use the *Framework* to consider the factors that may either contribute to the problem or offer a potential change strategy. Most elements can be connected to any significant problem your school may encounter.
- Establish indicators of success for each change you identify, including student outcomes.
- Consider working with other schools that have experienced success in solving the problem you are trying to address.
- Use your weekly professional development and family engagement time to support structured conversations across your school community (find [resources here](#)).
- Refer to the [Handbook for Professional Learning](#) and its [activities](#) as you plan.

Implement

- Try the change you identified. While the change may be small, ensure it is tied to the specific problem identified in the planning phase and that you are able to measure its impact.
- Collect evidence aligned to the established indicators of success to inform adjustments at the end of the cycle.

Reflect and Adjust

- In collaborative groups, reflect on the impact of the change and then adjust plans, identifying a new or adjusted change you will try.
- Use the *Framework* as a lens for formatively assessing progress, not only for individual elements, but also for the interplay among elements.

Share Lessons Learned

- As a school community, ensure you capture your successes and failures in order to continuously learn. [By comparing results to predicted outcomes, you gain insight into the factors at play. Wrong predictions are as valuable as correct ones.](#)
- When changes you try have the intended impact on your success indicators, take time to consider how you will share this knowledge with other teams both within and outside your school. Use your weekly professional development and family engagement time. Expect your superintendent and borough field support center to share successful approaches from around the City.
- It is also important to ensure that you communicate your challenges with this work to your superintendent and borough field support center so they can work with you to address the needs of your school and community.

CONNECTIONS

The *Framework for Great Schools* fits into the existing landscape of New York City schools. The *Framework* lays out a common vision for all schools — it tells us *what* we aim to accomplish. The process for applying the *Framework* suggests the steps for achieving the vision — it tells us *how* to reach our aims. The NYCDOE measures gauge progress toward our vision — they tell us *how we will know* if we are successful. Element by element alignments of the *Framework* to NYCDOE measures and resources are [available here](#).

What = the *Framework for Great Schools*

The [research base](#) for the *Framework for Great Schools* describes the interplay of six critical elements that lead to school success. As our school communities plan cycles of learning, the *Framework* can expand our view, helping us balance the need to focus on specific issues with the need to understand and attend to the interplay of elements in the school community. The *Framework* can also help assess the capacities of our school communities to impact student learning.

How = a process for applying the *Framework*

The process for schools to learn and grow continues to be: 1) develop a shared understanding of the work; 2) assess needs and establish goals; and 3) engage in cycles of learning.

How We Will Know = NYCDOE measures

In order to ensure that each of our students will be ready for the next stage of their education and, ultimately, for college, a career, and a future as a productive adult, we continue to assess the qualitative and quantitative performance of students, teachers, principals, and schools. The NYCDOE measures of performance continue to be:

- [School Quality Guide](#)
- [Advance](#)
- [Principal Performance Review](#)
- [Quality Review](#)
- [School Survey](#)

Resources for Applying the *Framework*

- [Alignment across the NYCDOE: Linking Each Element of the *Framework for Great Schools* with NYCDOE Measures and Resources](#)
- Research briefs on the work of Dr. Anthony Bryk
 - » [Organizing Schools for Improvement: Lessons from Chicago](#)
 - » [Learning to Improve: How America's Schools Can Get Better at Getting Better](#)
- [Professional Learning Activities with Facilitation Guides](#)
 - » [Step 1](#)
 - » [Step 2](#)
 - » [Step 3](#)
- [Case studies of NYCDOE schools](#)

