Chapter 3. Roadmap for School Leaders

Prior research evidence\textsuperscript{1,2} underscores the need for a school leader to organize and select appropriate stakeholders to identify the specific steps required to implement new programs, strategies, and initiatives in the school environment for efficient and systematic success. There are a series of steps that leaders and relevant teams must consider in order to ensure school-wide improvements.\textsuperscript{3} These include having all who are involved understand: (1) what is to be implemented, (2) why it is being implemented, (3) how it will be implemented, and (4) how implementation fidelity will be measured and monitored.

School leaders must first assess the level of teacher/staff buy-in to the new initiative. School leaders should also provide research-and evidence-based evidence supporting the new initiative and must be believers in having instructional practices implemented with accuracy and fidelity, and with proper assessments to evaluate effectiveness and student growth. School leaders must determine the best time to begin the initiative and be willing to take the time and responsibility to see that the initiation gets off to a good start.

For school leaders interested in using the MSM Field Guide to apply the research-based Principles and Practices school-wide, a road map is provided to explain the recommended steps and the related tools to support use of the MSM Field Guide. See the step-by-step guide for using MSM on the next two pages.
### Steps to School Improvement Using the MSM Field Guide

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<thead>
<tr>
<th>Steps to School Improvement Using the MSM Field Guide</th>
<th>Description of Each Step</th>
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<tr>
<td><strong>Step 1. Get Ready to Explore MSM</strong></td>
<td>The first step in school improvement using the MSM Field Guide is to determine if the identified school and district is ready to implement MSM. GWBI offers an interactive, online MSM School Readiness Assessment for school leaders interested in implementing the MSM Research Field Guide on their website (<a href="#">HYPERLINK HERE</a>) and in Appendix E. Based on the results of the readiness assessment, school leaders who are not ready to implement are provided resources and guidance so that they can become ready.</td>
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<tr>
<td><strong>Step 2. MSM School Leadership Team</strong></td>
<td>Next, review section “Who to Involve” for more information about the ideal leadership roles and expertise to have in place for school improvement using the MSM Field Guide. For example, we recommend that a school identify members to include in a Leadership Team to lead school improvement efforts.</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td><strong>Step 3. Engage with the MSM Field Guide</strong></td>
<td>The MSM program developers strongly encourage every school and district interested in undertaking implementing the MSM Field Guide</td>
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Steps to School Improvement Using the MSM Field Guide | Description of Each Step
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Guide to first review the Content Dimensions in the Foundation. Once the conditions for reform and improvement are in place from the Foundation, it is time to fully engage with the other two areas.

Each Content Dimension begins with a *Pre-Reading Activity*. The pre-reading activity is designed to have the reader reflect on his or her current performance and knowledge of the research in each Dimension. Each Dimension ends with a *Quality Framework for Self-Reflection* tool for schools to complete to identify strengths and deficiencies that should be considered when developing the School Improvement Plan.

**Step 4. Develop School Improvement Plan**

To increase the likelihood of improved outcomes for students, it is ideal to implement each Principle; however, it cannot all be done at once. School/district leadership teams working on MSM will use their Quality Framework for Self-Reflections and their judgment based on priorities and available resources to design their unique School Improvement Plan. That plan will change from year to year as schools work to change practices based on what they learn in the MSM Field Guide. A template is provided in Appendix F to help school/district leadership teams plan for school improvement.

**Step 5. Continuous Cycle of Improvement**

Using the Principles and Practices from the MSM Field Guide for school improvement

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*a* All of the education research and education reform experts who participated in the development of this Platform agree that the systematic use of performance data as well as having effective leaders and teachers are all critical when engaging in systematic school improvement. This is why we recommend starting with the Foundation Content Dimensions.
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<td><strong>Implement</strong></td>
<td>requires the systematic use of performance data to inform data-driven decision making to monitor progress and make changes along the way to maximize school improvement.</td>
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<td><strong>Check</strong></td>
<td><strong>Redirect</strong></td>
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Several school readiness criteria are recommended to be in place prior to using the MSM Field Guide for school-wide improvement. These criteria comprise the MSM School Readiness Assessment and each is presented here:

**School Readiness Criteria**

- Consistent school leadership
- School leadership team in place
- Moderate levels of teacher turnover
- Response to Intervention (RtI) processes
- Willingness and support for MSM Implementation
- Data management tool
- Assessment and feedback process
- Community/parent engagement programs
- Afterschool programs
- Teacher planning time

Use and completion of this guidance may lead to a greater understanding on the part of interested schools of how best to move forward with implementation of the research-based principles and practices in the MSM Field Guide.

An interactive online version of the MSM School Readiness Assessment is available at [HYPERLINK HERE](HYPERLINK HERE). By completing the assessment online, users will receive customized discussion, templates and resources based on the selection of current position for each readiness criterion. If use of the interactive, online assessment is not possible, a copy of the assessment as well as all response feedback is provided in Appendix E.
Step 2. Who to Involve?

In order to implement such a school-wide change that is involved with school improvement, several key players are needed to guide the implementation of the research-based principles and practices in the MSM Field Guide. First we present a description of a recommended key person called the MSM Facilitator to organize this effort. Second, we describe a recommended composition for the MSM School Leadership Team to take responsibility for the implementation of MSM. Finally we describe two additional roles that are important to achieving goals for all students, a Data Facilitator and a Student Support Facilitator.

MSM School Facilitator

The MSM School Facilitator is the key person at the school responsible for understanding the resources available as part of the MSM Program. They lead the school through each phase of the MSM School Readiness Assessment, Review of the MSM Field Guide, Completion of the MSM Quality Framework for Self Reflection, and the Development of the School Improvement Plan. They monitor the progress of the school throughout the improvement process. The progress monitoring starts with baseline data from the MSM School Readiness Assessment and continues through quarterly reviews of data collected to measure progress according to the goals of the school improvement plan. Their primary responsibility is to provide ongoing feedback and needs to the MSM School Leadership Team. They work with the MSM School Leadership Team to problem solve barriers and to guide adjustments to the improvement plan gathering ongoing feedback from those using the MSM Field Guide. Each school using the MSM Field Guide will need to consider the resources available to support this kind of leadership position or whether it is a role that is given to an existing school leader.

When considering the ideal candidate for the MSM School Facilitator, what is needed is a blend of strategic and tactical capabilities that can effectively pre-identify and spot opportunities for collaboration as well as potential obstacles/conflicts and who can work to leverage/resolve quickly. This person possesses a blend of interpersonal/communication/influencing skills and disciplined project management skills with a level of seniority and expertise to command respect and action. This role is pivotal to the success of driving and documenting the impact of using the MSM Field Guide for school improvement. A Checklist for MSM School Facilitator Qualities is provided in Appendix E as a resource.

MSM School Leadership Team

For comprehensive school improvement, the school principal provides leadership, but collective leadership is important for implementation of a school-wide effort. Collective leadership sets the expectation that teachers, school leaders, and the community play an active role in the decision-making process for the school. This encourages motivation and commitment to change and allows for the development of future leaders. It is often not feasible to involve everyone in every decision, so it is helpful to have a core set of leaders that represent the needs and interests of the teachers, the instructional leaders, the students, the parents, and the community. School principals should develop a school leadership team to collaborate in the development of the School Improvement Plan with the MSM Facilitator playing a key leadership
role. A model for the make-up of the School Leadership Team is provided in the following figure.

**Figure 2. School Leadership Team**

A Checklist *MSM School Leadership Team Member Qualities* is provided in Appendix E as a resource.

**Student Support Facilitator**

It is recommended that each school deciding to implement the MSM Program have an onsite student advocate for the students who are most in need, referred to in this document as the Student Support Facilitator. The Student Support Facilitator’s role is to work to build meaningful and trusting relationships with the most in-need students, to offer and provide support to students and families, and to assist students in setting and monitoring their specific program goals.

Research documented in the MSM Field Guide has shown that the support and guidance of a student support advocate, combined with the social, emotional, and behavioral learning strategies taught by campus leaders and teachers, will greatly benefit middle grades students in their attempt to stay on-track, graduate, and become college and career ready. Schools will need to
determine if resources are available to fund a full time Student Support Facilitator. If there are no resources, teachers can share some of this responsibility with a school structured time each week for teachers to work with a consistent group of students (sometimes called “Advisory”). Adults on campus can also break up the duties that would have been carried out by a student support facilitator, by providing different parts of the support that is needed for students.

What follows is a description of the vital role they can play as well some recommended qualifications in recruiting for and selecting the appropriate person for this important role.

**Data Facilitator**

The next person to involve in the school improvement effort using the MSM Field Guide is someone who has a strong grasp of available school data and its potential use in monitoring progress towards meeting the goals of the school. The main responsibility of the Data Facilitator will be to provide a systematic way for teachers to use data to inform instructional decisions and for the MSM School Leadership Team to have the data it needs to monitor progress and make decisions.

The data facilitator should help increase teacher capacity to use data to identify student needs and develop appropriate action plans; this can occur through monthly meetings with teachers to discuss student performance data, identify trends, and consider appropriate responses. By modeling how to use data to gauge progress towards learning goals and driven instructional decisions, data facilitators can help teachers feel more confident in their own abilities as they develop a better appreciation of the value of using data to manage student performance.

By data we mean more than just annual achievement data. Data should also include benchmark or interim assessments, demographic data, attendance and behavior data, course performance data, and perception data from surveys. The Data Facilitator may need to work with district administration and Instructional Technology staff to ensure that the data are accessible by teachers and the MSM School Leadership Team.

The Performance Management Content Dimension provides research-based practices the Data Facilitator can follow to support the school in effective use of data. What follows is a checklist to use when recruiting and selecting a Data Facilitator if one does not already exist within the school.

**District Vertical Team**

Another structure that will improve school improvement using the MSM Field Guide is to have quarterly meetings of a district vertical team that includes leaders from feeder elementary schools and high schools which the middle grades students typically attend after they graduate. This vertical team can also include representatives from the district administration such as curriculum coordinators and other leaders, such as the associate superintendent or superintendent. This quarterly meeting provides the opportunity for the MSM School Facilitator and other members from the School Leadership Team to share about their school improvement efforts and progress using the MSM Field Guide.
Having the opportunity to share highlights provides concrete descriptions of the types of activities elementary students and their parents can look forward to when they move up into middle grades. The achievement gains and other improved student outcomes (attendance, behavior) are important for the high schools to know about to ensure that the students have a rigorous high school program available when they graduate from middle grades.

Having this opportunity to share research-based principles and practices that are working at the middle grades will also encourage use of research-based principles and practices at the elementary and high school level. This gives the superintendent and other district administration the opportunity to learn from the school improvement efforts using the MSM Field Guide at the middle grades to inform other reform efforts going on in the district to improve student outcomes.

If there are any barriers to using the MSM Field Guide that involve district constraints, this district vertical team structure would provide an opportunity to problem solve such barriers or constraints. There may be an existing vertical team structure that the school can use for this purpose, or it might make more sense to have special quarterly meetings with this vertical team focused on the use of the MSM Field Guide. Therefore, we do not provide a checklist of qualifications for this team, but recommend that the school be strategic in selecting district involvement to maximize the success of the school improvement efforts.

Independent Evaluator

Some school districts have a research and evaluation department that could be engaged to provide objective formative and summative feedback and evaluation during the implementation process. If these services are not available, a school can consider procuring an independent evaluator. Involving an evaluator in the implementation efforts will help a school be very measured in their approach, project design, plan, data collection plans and will assist the school in making appropriate statements about the success of the efforts made to implement the plan.

An evaluator is someone who has received formal training in research and/or evaluation and has experience in conducting program evaluations. Independent evaluators are individuals or organizations that have no personal or financial stake in your school, the MSM Program, or the outcome of the evaluation. Conducting a thorough identification and interview processes can help identify a high-quality independent evaluator. Note that although many evaluators are members of professional evaluation organizations, such American Educational Research Association, membership in these organizations does not necessarily imply a qualified program evaluator. The following resources are provided in Appendix E: Hiring an Independent Evaluator, Interviewing Evaluators, and Checklist for Independent Evaluator Qualities.
Step 3. Engage with MSM Field Guide

To fully engage with the MSM Field Guide, every interested school is strongly encouraged to reflect on current practices once readiness has been achieved and a MSM School Leadership Team has been identified. This recommended reflection includes taking a critical and authentic look into the way current practices are implemented and to consider what areas may be the best opportunities for improvement. To aid in this reflective period, pre-reading discussion questions have been presented prior to the beginning of each Content Dimension (Pre-Reading Activities). This thoughtful and reflective time will assist the interested school personnel to more fully understand the current level of research-based practices prior to exploring the MSM Field Guide.

After reflecting on current practice, it is strongly recommended that interested schools spend time in reviewing the Principles and Practices within the Content Dimensions. Finally, once interested school personnel have read and discussed the Content Dimensions, each of the Quality Framework for Self-Reflection tools (that appear at the end of each Content Dimension) should be completed. When complete, each Quality Framework identifies strengths and areas for improvement that should be considered when developing a School Improvement Plan.

Quality Framework for Self Reflection

The Middle School Matters Quality Framework for Self-Reflection is used to guide the school in determining areas of strength and areas of need to target in the implementation plan. The MSM Field Guide principles and practices should be reviewed prior to completing this Self-Reflection for each Content Dimension. See Figure 3 for a sample Framework.

The Quality Framework consists of several elements:

- **Principle** – This is a description of a research-based action or dimension of a school that has been shown to be related to improved outcomes for students. A detailed description of each principle is provided in the MSM Field Guide.

- **Practices** – This is a description of specific practices that if in place document that the school has met the associated research-based principle.

- **Review Supporting Documentation** – This is a list of recommended types of information to use as evidence to support the assessment of whether this principle and related practices are in place. Each box can be checked to record what types of evidence were reviewed.

- **Conditions** – For each practice, there are several conditions that need to be in place to reach the model level of implementation of this practice. For each practice, a school will check off which conditions are met based on evidence collected in their review of supporting documentation. Then they will calculate the total conditions met for each practice.

- **Total Conditions Met** – For each practice that relates to the Principle, a school finds the total conditions that they have met, earning one point per condition met. At the end of
In Appendix F an Example of How a School Leader Can Use the Quality Framework for Self-Reflection is provided as a resource.
Step 4. Develop a School Improvement Plan

Once the Quality Frameworks have been complete, areas of strengths and needs should be identified and can be used in guiding the school forward to improvement. Schools may proceed in a number of ways:

1) Select the highest need area identified from each Quality Framework and complete a School Improvement Plan Template for each

2) Prioritize the highest need areas from the Quality Frameworks and decided how many to attempt to implement

3) Select the highest need across all Quality Frameworks as the sole initial focus of improvement

Decisions should be made in consideration of other initiatives, resources available and other factors related to implementation. Starting smaller may be beneficial so that enough time and energy can be devoted to appropriate and successful implementation. In Appendix D there is an alignment of the MSM Field guide principles and practices to the Common Core State Standards and the Texas Essential Knowledge and Skills for grades 6 to 8 in Mathematics and English/Language Arts and Reading. This alignment can help a school target specific relevant principles and practices. However, implementation of all of the research-based principles and practices in a Content Dimension is encouraged to maximize student outcomes.

The School Improvement Plan Template is provided as a guide for those planning specific Principles and Practices which are being implemented as a result of an identified need area. The template includes four stages.

- In stage 1, the school will focus on the strengths that were identified through the completion of the Quality Frameworks. With completion of this part of the template, a plan will be put in place to recognize strengths and successes, understand the mechanisms that contributed to the success as well as strategies for maintaining the identified strengths and successes.

- In stage 2, a school will complete a Strength, Weakness, Opportunity, and Threat analysis (SWOT analysis) to identify assets and concerns with respect to the identified needs (opportunities for improvement). From the completion of the SWOT analysis, schools can further detail the opportunities and goals by specifying both long-term and short-term goals for success.

- The third stage is where the school will plan out the actual implementation details. Now that long- and short-term goals for success have been identified, further refinement of a plan of action can occur. This portion of the template helps the user define success in more fine-grained manner, identify the particular resources available to leverage, determine what strategies are to be implemented and who will implement those strategies as well as what training or other pre-implementation needs are necessary.
The final stage is where the school should think about evaluation of the implementation of the School Improvement Plan. This is the opportunity to consider what information should be collected, by when and by whom, who will be responsible for the evaluation, and how will results be shared with all interested and relevant parties.

With the completion of the entire School Improvement Plan Template, schools should be able to:

- begin implementation by celebrating known strengths and successes in line with the MSM Field Guide;
- identify strengths, weakness, opportunities, and threats to implementation so that a proactive knowledge base is in place;
- have a detailed implementation plan in place that can be available for questions as well as to check implementation fidelity by implementers (whether the implementation is occurring as intended); and
- have an evaluation plan in place so that results will be known and be able to be shared at the end of implementation.

Such proactive planning is highly recommended so that the larger school community can support the school as the teachers and leaders undertake improvement efforts and celebrate as significant achievements are made.
Step 5. Continuous Cycle of Improvement

Once a school leader or leadership team has completed the Pre-Reading Activity, reviewed the Content Dimension, and completed the Quality Framework Self-Reflection for all areas of the MSM Field Guide, they are ready to begin the Continuous Cycle of Improvement. This continuous cycle of improvement involves the following five stages.

**Stage 1: Develop a School Improvement Plan.** This was discussed in Step 4. The plan should be specific to include the time frame for implementation, the teachers, class periods, and students involved, and the measures to assess implementation fidelity (how well the instructional practices were implemented according to the research-based practices) and student outcomes.

**Stage 2: Implement the Plan.** The implementation of research-based principles and practices in the Plan should last for a defined period of time. During implementation a school leader should seek support as discussed in Step 3. It is also beneficial to make note of any unpredicted obstacles, distractions, or constraints that may have an effect on implementation and student outcomes.

**Stage 3: Assess implementation and related outcomes.** Ongoing monitoring of implementation and student outcomes provides immediate feedback on perceptions (teacher/student satisfaction/concern with changes), understanding (student knowledge and skills), and other issues related to the implementation and goals. School-based assessments such as unit tests or pre/post assessments can provide information on differences in student performance after implementation of the new practices. School leaders or other teachers can provide classroom observation feedback on implementation of the new practices.

**Stage 4: Celebrate successes and determine needed changes.** It is important to celebrate the things that went well during implementation and any signs of success in terms of student outcomes. Obstacles and challenges need to be considered and the school leader or leadership team can determine what changes are needed to the Plan. School administrators and other teachers can provide support in reviewing the data from Stage 3 and providing suggestions for changes to the plan.

**Stage 5: Determine changes to the Plan and Continue implementation of the Plan.** This is the time to make changes and edits to the Plan. It may mean discontinuing additional current practices that are not found to be effective to allow sufficient time and energy for the new research-based instructional practices. School administrators and other teachers can provide support in reviewing the data from Stage 3 and providing suggestions for changes to the plan.

After Stage 5 the cycle continues back at the top with the new plan at Stage 1. New learning, successes, and challenges can be shared with others in the school community along the way for professional learning for everyone at the school.
Chapter 3: ROAD MAP FOR SCHOOL LEADERS


