

Leading School Improvement

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SESSION GOALS:

- **Analyze a school profile** to identify strengths, challenges, and priority needs.
- **Use a needs assessment process** to determine root causes impacting student outcomes.
- **Develop aligned goals** from the district level to classroom level.
- **Identify the foundational systems** that drive sustainable school improvement.

School Rating Drives a Systems Approach



**Better Systems
Yield
Better Metrics**



Indicator
Achievement Are students achieving level 3 or 4 on state assessments?
Growth of All Students Are students achieving their individualized growth targets?
Growth of Lowest Quarter Are the students who are farthest behind growing?
Success Ready Graduate Are students graduating in four years? Are students demonstrating postsecondary readiness for enlistment, enrollment, or employment?

Move away from isolated initiatives and toward coherent systems.

Building Profiles: The Quadrants



**High Achievement,
High Growth**

**Low Achievement,
High Growth**

**High Achievement,
Low Growth**

**Low Achievement,
Low Growth**

High Achievement, High Growth

This building demonstrates a highly coherent system where standard-aligned, high-rigor Tier 1 instruction is happening daily across all classrooms. Core instruction is strong, and robust tracking systems ensure that any small learning gaps are addressed immediately before they widen.

What Building Leaders Should Look For / Next Steps:

- **Verify Sustainability:** Ensure that this high performance is consistent across all student subgroups, including the bottom quartile.
- **Examine Replication Potential:** Audit their collaborative team protocols and data-tracking systems to serve as a blueprint for underperformance.
- **Focus on Enrichment:** Check if Tier 1 instruction includes extended learning opportunities or extension activities that continue to push top-performing students.

Low Achievement, Low Growth

This profile indicates that instruction is likely below grade level or severely misaligned across the board. Tier 1 core instruction lacks rigor, and the intervention systems (Tier 2 and Tier 3) are either disconnected from core standards or failing to track whether students are actually mastering prerequisite skills.

What Building Leaders Should Look For / Next Steps:

- **Audit Tier 1 Alignment:** Conduct immediate walkthroughs to check if classroom activities and assessment practices are actually aligned to grade-level standards and Achievement Level Descriptors (ALDs).
- **Review Curriculum Fidelity:** Look for major gaps or inconsistent implementation of the curriculum from classroom to classroom.
- **Rebuild Intervention Foundations:** Investigate whether current interventions are scaffolded to help students reach grade-level expectations or if they are simply repeating low-level work.

High Achievement, Low Growth

While overall proficiency looks positive—often due to strong historical student baseline skills—students are not making meaningful progress over the school year. This typically indicates a lack of instructional urgency, low expectations for continuous growth, or weak Tier 2 intervention systems that fail to track live student progress.

What Building Leaders Should Look For / Next Steps:

- **Evaluate Rigor & Differentiated Instruction:** Walk classrooms to determine if teachers are teaching to the ceiling or if instruction stalls once students hit basic "proficiency" targets.
- **Check Live Progress Monitoring:** Examine how the school tracks standard mastery dynamically rather than relying solely on end-of-year results.
- **Review Tier 2 Interventions:** Ensure that intervention systems are tightly aligned to core standards and actively driving growth for students who may be missing specific concepts.

Low Achievement, High Growth

This profile shows that things are moving in the right direction. High growth indicates that effective Tier 2 and Tier 3 interventions are likely in place, or that Tier 1 practices are steadily improving. However, historical gaps or lingering inconsistencies in Tier 1 instructional rigor prevent these gains from translating into high overall proficiency yet.

What Building Leaders Should Look For / Next Steps:

- **Identify Tier 1 Gaps:** Walk every classroom to pinpoint exactly where inconsistencies in grade-level rigor or instructional practices are occurring.
- **Review Assessment Practices:** Check if classroom assessments match the high expectations of state standards or if they lean toward lower-level tasks.
- **Capitalize on Growth Drivers:** Isolate what is working well in their collaborative teams or intervention blocks (especially within the bottom quartile) and anchor those successes into standard daily core instruction.

Getting the Most from a Needs Assessment



The School Improvement Plan



Narrowing the Needs Assessment Focus

A strong needs assessment is not about looking at all the data.

- It's about looking at the right data in the right order

Focus efforts where they will have the greatest impact.

- Identify top 1-2 priority areas
- District strategic alignment
- Engage staff in data reflection



The Needs Assessment

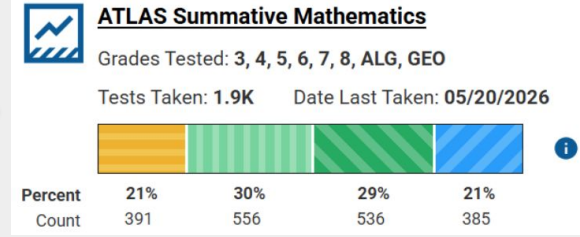


Narrowing Focus

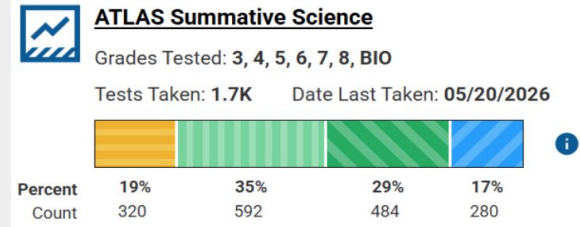
% of students performing at Level 1 and 2

- Establishes a starting point
- Identifies where the greatest need exists
- Prevents jumping into a subject based on perception, comfort, or urgency alone

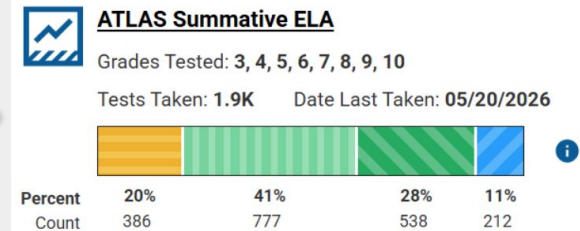
51%



54%



61%



Example

Assessment Name	Test Group	Test Grade	Test Reason	Student Count	Average Score	Performance Distribution
ATLAS Kindergarten Literacy Summative	ATLAS Summative	KG	2024-2025 - ATLAS Summative	211	1059 ± 1	Percent Count: 11% (23), 27% (56), 45% (96), 17% (36)
ATLAS Grade 1 Literacy Summative	ATLAS Summative	1	2024-2025 - ATLAS Summative	219	1059 ± 1	Percent Count: 10% (21), 42% (93), 36% (79), 12% (26)
ATLAS Grade 2 Literacy Summative	ATLAS Summative	2	2024-2025 - ATLAS Summative	219	1059 ± 1	Percent Count: 10% (21), 42% (93), 36% (79), 12% (26)
ATLAS Grade 3 ELA Summative	ATLAS Summative	3	2024-2025 - ATLAS Summative	219	1059 ± 1	Percent Count: 10% (21), 42% (93), 36% (79), 12% (26)
ATLAS Grade 4 ELA Summative	ATLAS Summative	4	2024-2025 - ATLAS Summative	219	1059 ± 1	Percent Count: 10% (21), 42% (93), 36% (79), 12% (26)
ATLAS Grade 5 ELA Summative	ATLAS Summative	5	2024-2025 - ATLAS Summative	231	1055 ± 1	Percent Count: 18% (41), 46% (106), 25% (58), 11% (26)
ATLAS Grade 6 ELA Summative	ATLAS Summative	6	2024-2025 - ATLAS Summative	231	1054 ± 1	Percent Count: 22% (50), 40% (93), 28% (65), 10% (23)
ATLAS Grade 7 ELA Summative	ATLAS Summative	7	2024-2025 - ATLAS Summative	229	1055 ± 1	Percent Count: 16% (37), 41% (94), 32% (74), 10% (24)
ATLAS Grade 8 ELA Summative	ATLAS Summative	8	2024-2025 - ATLAS Summative	221	1056 ± 1	Percent Count: 17% (37), 41% (91), 29% (65), 13% (28)
ATLAS Grade 9 ELA Summative	ATLAS Summative	9	2024-2025 - ATLAS Summative	210	1055 ± 1	Percent Count: 17% (36), 40% (84), 31% (66), 11% (24)

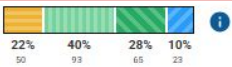
What grade level trends do you notice?

The School Improvement Plan



Narrowing the Needs Assessment Focus

- Narrow focus from content area → specific grades
- Prevent broad, unfocused improvement efforts
- Prioritize where leadership attention will have the most impact

↓ ATLAS Grade 5 ELA Summative	▼	ATLAS Summative	5	2024-2025 - ATLAS Summative	231	1055 ± 1 ⓘ	
↓ ATLAS Grade 6 ELA Summative	▼	ATLAS Summative	6	2024-2025 - ATLAS Summative	231	1054 ± 1 ⓘ	
↓ ATLAS Grade 7 ELA Summative	▼	ATLAS Summative	7	2024-2025 - ATLAS Summative	229	1055 ± 1 ⓘ	

Key Leadership Move:

Focus improvement efforts where need is both significant and actionable, not diluted across every grade.

The School Improvement Plan



The Longitudinal Report

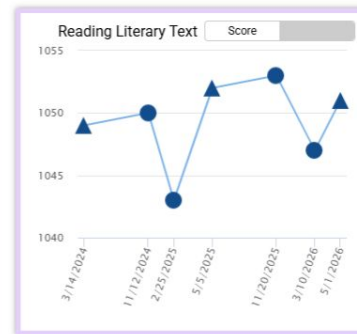
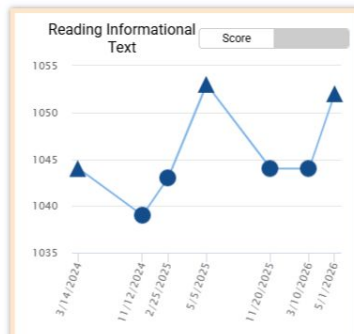
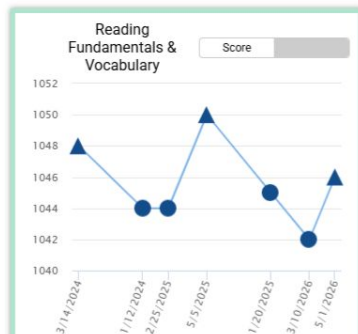


Same cohort of students over 3-year period.

How would you use this data to make informed decisions?

Key Leadership Move:

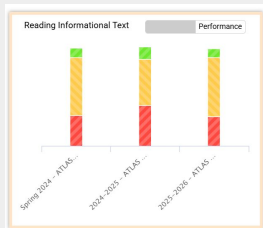
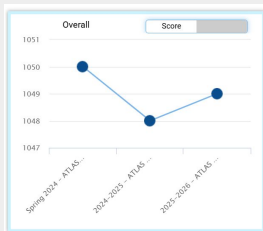
If the same subcategory is low across multiple years, what systems might be impacting the data?



The School Improvement Plan



The Cross-Sectional Report



Performance Levels	School Year & Test Reason		
	2023 - 2024 Spring 2024 - ATLAS Summative	2024 - 2025 2024-2025 - ATLAS Summative	2025 - 2026 2025-2026 - ATLAS Summative
Overall			
Student Count	70	79	96
Average Scale Score	1050 ± 2	1048 ± 2	1049 ± 2
%Level 1	27%	38%	34%
%Level 2	43%	35%	42%
%Level 3	27%	23%	19%
%Level 4	3%	4%	5%
Reading Fundamentals & Vocabulary			
Average Reporting Category Scale Score	1045 ± 3	1047 ± 2	1046 ± 2
%Below Mastery	46%	56%	51%
%At/Near Mastery	47%	38%	41%
%Above Mastery	7%	6%	8%
Reading Informational Text			
Average Reporting Category Scale Score	1044 ± 3	1042 ± 3	1052 ± 2
%Below Mastery	31%	41%	30%
%At/Near Mastery	59%	47%	60%
%Above Mastery	10%	13%	9%
Reading Literary Text			
Average Reporting Category Scale Score	1041 ± 3	1047 ± 3	1049 ± 2
%Below Mastery	34%	20%	36%
%At/Near Mastery	59%	68%	53%
%Above Mastery	7%	11%	10%

Same grade level, different cohorts of students over a 3-year period

How would you use this data to inform decisions?

Key Leadership Move:

If the same subcategory is low across multiple years, what systems might be impacting the data?

The “5 Whys” Root Cause Analysis



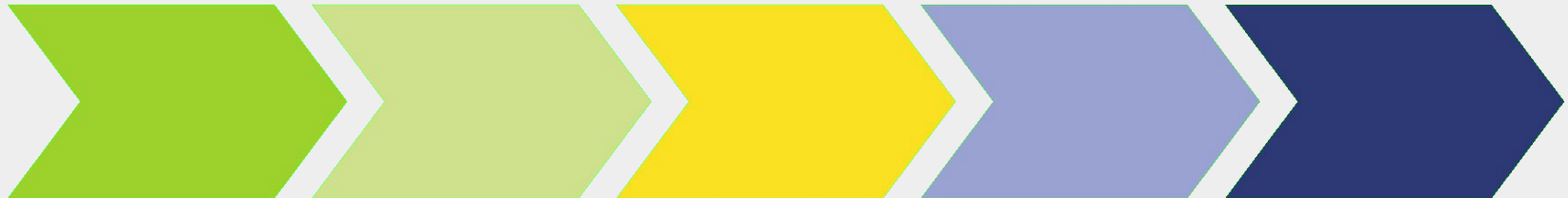
The 5 Whys is a problem-solving technique designed to peel away the layers of a symptom to find the underlying systemic issue.

- Start with the observable problem
- Look for processes
- Avoid general statements



[Reflection Tool](#)

The Causal Chain

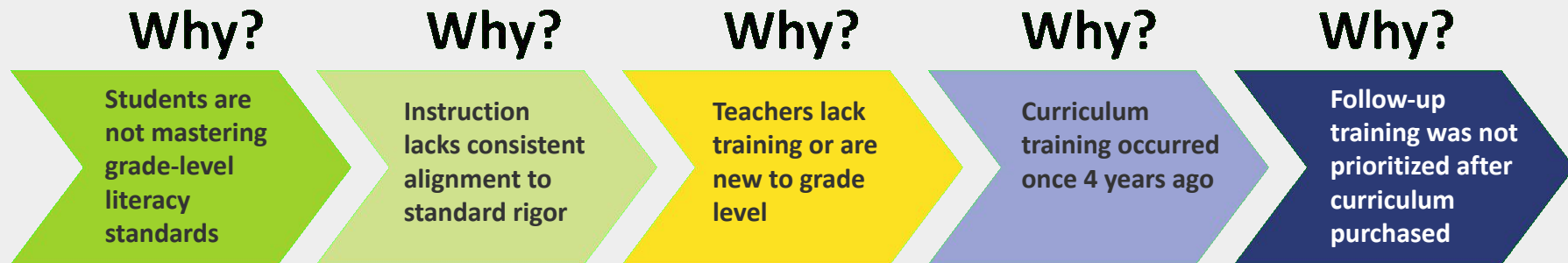


The “5 Whys” Example



PROBLEM

ELA dropped in achievement in Grade 2-6 with 6th grade as a priority.



ROOT CAUSE ANALYSIS

A missing or inconsistent system for standards-aligned professional development on the curriculum and lack of instructional coaching.

From Data to Direction: Setting Goals That Lead to Action



Goal Setting: What goal moves data forward?



SPECIFIC

What outcomes might you envision for these goals?

MEASURABLE

What might you notice when success emerges?

ATTAINABLE

What steps seem most likely to support progress?

RELEVANT

How might these goals connect to your priorities?

TIME-BOUND

What time frames might keep momentum moving?

EVIDENCE-BASED

What data could help shape your next steps?



District Goal Stem



District Level Goal Structure

By [date], the district will increase [specific student outcome] as measured by [named assessment], from [use 2026 Atlas Summative as baseline data] to [target], resulting in approximately [number] additional students meeting expectations. Progress will be monitored using [interim assessments, CBMs, and HQIM-aligned measures] aligned to grade-level standards.

Example: By May 2027, the percentage of students scoring proficient or advanced (Levels 3 and 4) in ELA on the ATLAS Summative Assessment will increase from 42% (420 of 1,000 students) to 50% (500 of 1,000 students), resulting in approximately 80 additional students demonstrating proficiency. Progress toward this goal will be monitored through weekly standards, curriculum, and ALD reviews; strategic instructional walkthroughs; timely feedback to teachers; and the use of walkthrough and student performance data to inform next instructional steps aligned to grade-level standards.

School Goal Stem



School Goal Structure

By [date], [school name] will increase [specific student outcome] as measured by [named assessment], from [use 2026 Atlas Summative as baseline data] to [target], resulting in approximately [number] additional students meeting expectations. Progress will be monitored using [interim assessments, CBMs, and HQIM-aligned measures] aligned to grade-level standards.

Example

By May 2027, Arkansas School will increase the percentage of students scoring proficient or advanced (Levels 3 and 4) in ELA on the ATLAS Summative Assessment from 38% (114 of 300 students) to 50% (150 of 300 students), resulting in approximately 36 additional students demonstrating proficiency. Progress toward this goal will be monitored through CTM data reviews, quarterly interim assessments, curriculum-based measures, student work analysis, instructional walkthroughs, and targeted instructional adjustments aligned to grade-level standards.

Teacher/Student Goal Stem



Teacher/Student Goal Structure

By [date], [teacher/classroom/grade level] will increase the number and percentage of students demonstrating [specific skill or outcome] from [baseline] to [target], resulting in approximately [number] additional students meeting grade-level expectations. Progress will be monitored through [CBMs, student work analysis, benchmark assessments, and/or HQIM-embedded measures] aligned to grade-level standards.

Example

By May 2027, Mrs. Smith's Grade 2 classroom will increase the number of students meeting grade-level expectations in foundational literacy skills from 12 of 20 students (60%) to 18 of 20 students (90%), resulting in approximately 6 additional students demonstrating proficiency in decoding and encoding grade-level words. Progress will be monitored through curriculum-based measures (CBMs), student work analysis, benchmark assessments, and ongoing review of standards-aligned instructional data.

What's Next?



Next Week

Immediate, low-barrier tasks



Next Month

Sustained structural shifts



This Year

Overarching systemic goal achieved

From Planning to Practice



SMARTE Goal: By May 2027, all K–2 teachers will skillfully internalize and implement HQIM lessons to ensure students receive explicit, standards-aligned foundational skills instruction in decoding and encoding. Implementation will be monitored through lesson internalization artifacts, classroom walkthrough data using the Key Levers tool, and collaborative team meeting documentation.

EXPECT

This Week: Teachers internalize upcoming HQIM foundational skills lessons.

Next Week: Teachers plan & deliver explicit foundational skills instruction.

Next Month: HQIM foundational skills lessons are implemented with integrity across all K-2 classrooms.

MODEL

This Week: Leaders model the lesson internalization process and clarify instruction expectations

Next Week: Collaborative teams rehearse HQIM lesson delivery together.

Next Month: Leaders establish ongoing systems for planning, collaboration, and reflection.

MONITOR

This Week: Collect baseline walkthrough evidence using the Key Levers tool and student data.

Next Week: Review collaborative team meeting documentation & conduct classroom walkthroughs.

Next Month: Analyze trends across artifacts, walkthrough data, and meeting notes.

ADJUST

This Week: Address barriers to HQIM implementation.

Next Week: Target coaching and support based on walkthrough data, student data, and planning data.

Next Month: Celebrate successes, elevate exemplars, and adjust PL and support based on trends and identified gaps

It's working!

Not working?

Action Steps that Actually Move the Needle



Five Systems Driving School Improvement



Instructional, Data, Learning, and Culture Systems Working Together



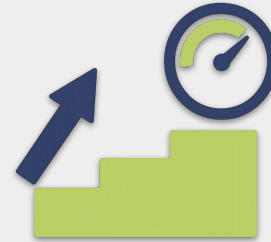
Grade-Level Instruction



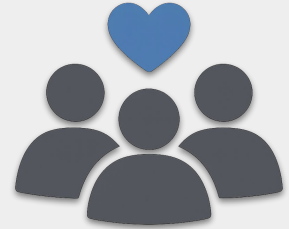
Data-Driven CTMs



Response to Learning



Instructional Walkthroughs



School Culture & Behavior





System 1: Grade-Level Instruction

REFLECTIVE QUESTIONS:

- Are standards, curriculum, and ALDs aligned across schools?
- How are my leaders ensuring grade-level instruction happens daily in every classroom?

Practical Actions

Scenario: Ensuring Grade-Level Learning for All

After receiving a school rating of a D, you gather walkthrough data and student level data in your building. While most classrooms are teaching grade-level standards, rigor is consistently low, resulting in low achievement across the school.

Review curriculum, standards, and ALD alignment across classrooms to ensure consistent expectations.

Conduct classroom walkthroughs with principals to monitor evidence of grade-level instruction.

Establish common look-fors that define high-quality, grade-level teaching.

Use instructional data and student work to verify that grade-level standards are taught daily.

Review teaching coaching and feedback for instructional consistency.

System 2: Data-Driven Collaborative Teams

System #2: Data-Driven Collaborative Teams



Are we equipped to guide teams to improve student outcomes?

Are team meetings focused on results, not compliance?

Practical Actions

Observe team meetings to evaluate the focus of discussions.

Coach teams to use student outcome data to guide team decisions.

Establish meeting protocols centered on results, actions, and accountability.

Require clear next steps following each team discussion.

Monitor team outcomes to ensure meetings lead to improved student performance.

Scenario: Leading Teams Toward Results

A principal schedules regular collaborative and leadership team meetings, but discussions focus primarily on completing tasks, reviewing requirements, and sharing information. Little time is spent analyzing student outcomes or determining actions needed to improve results.



System 3: Response to Learning



System #3: Response to Learning



Scenario: Leading Teams Toward Results

Your school's improvement goal is to increase ELA proficiency from 38% to 50% by May 2027. Mid-year data shows that many students identified for Tier 2 and Tier 3 support are not making adequate growth. Collaborative team discussions reveal that interventions vary by teacher, progress-monitoring data is reviewed inconsistently, and some interventions are not aligned to grade-level standards.

Practical Actions

Set clear expectations for Tier 2 and Tier 3 intervention practices and instructional alignment.

Model and coach teams on using student data to select and adjust interventions.

Follow up on feedback to ensure intervention plans are implemented consistently.

Monitor progress data to evaluate student growth and intervention effectiveness.

Adjust supports and interventions when data indicates insufficient progress.



System 4: Instructional Walkthroughs

System #4: Instructional Walkthroughs

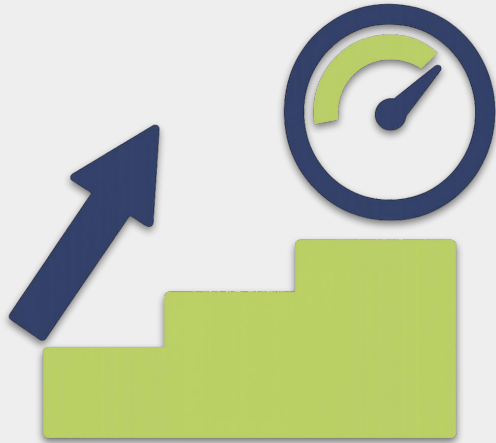


Non-negotiable.

Does your system include?

- **Schedule** *for walkthroughs or learning walks*
- **Simple tool** *aligned to Arkansas standards; key levers*
- **Timely feedback** *expectations for yourself/walkthrough leaders*
- **Monthly calibration** *with APs and/or coaches*

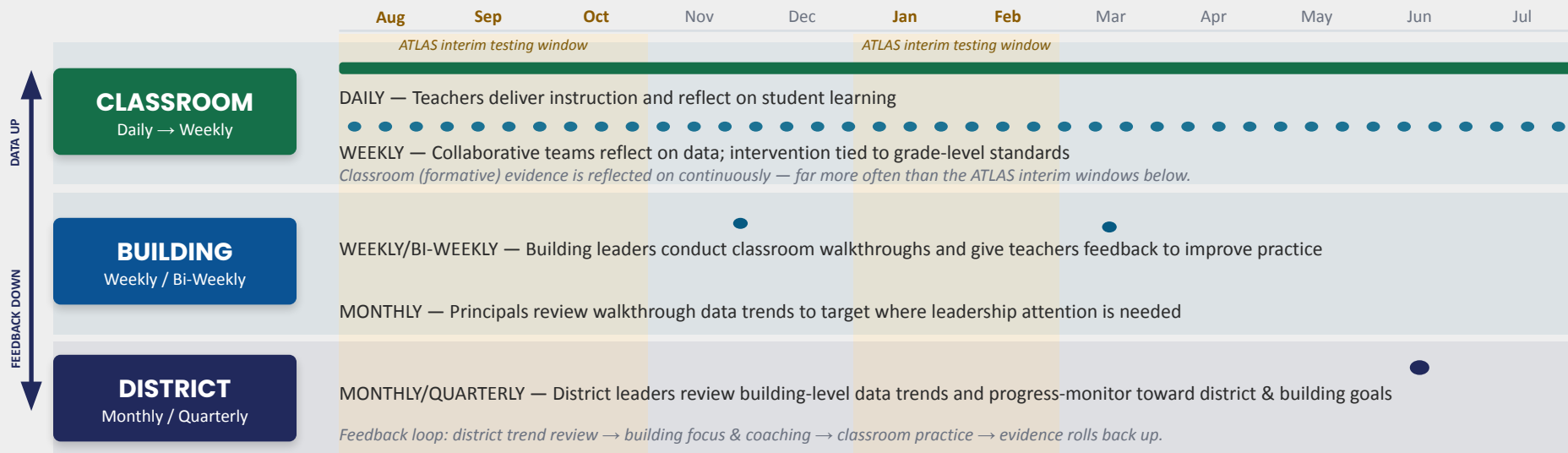
IMPACT increases instructional consistency, strengthens teacher clarity, and accelerates student mastery.



The Minimum



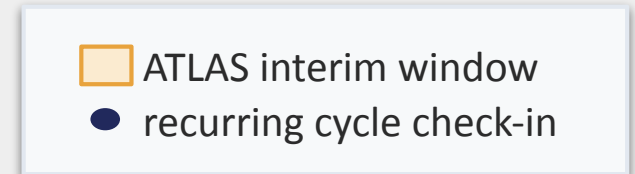
Classroom → Building → District cycles across the school year



- ATLAS interim window
- recurring cycle check-in

FEEDBACK DOWN

DATA UP



What Kind of Feedback?



- "Nice lesson."
- "That went well."
- "You need better classroom management."
- "Students weren't engaged."
- "Try harder to get everyone involved."
- "You need to differentiate more."

TESS Calibration (3-day training) focuses on Reinforcement (an area they are doing well in) and Refinement (an area of growth). Using this language consistently can help lessen cognitive load for teachers and give a structure for feedback.

A Better Example



Evidence:

You asked several open-ended questions, and students were eager to respond. Most answers came from volunteers, and you extended student thinking with follow-up questions such as, "What evidence supports that?"

Feedback:

Your questioning moved students beyond simple recall and encouraged them to justify their thinking, which aligns well with **Component 3b: Using Questioning and Discussion Techniques**. I noticed, however, that the discussion was driven primarily by the same few volunteers.

Reflective Question:

What structures could you add so every student has an opportunity to think and contribute before sharing with the whole class?

Possible Next Step:

- Incorporate strategies such as Think-Pair-Share, Everybody Writes, or Cold Call to increase equitable participation.

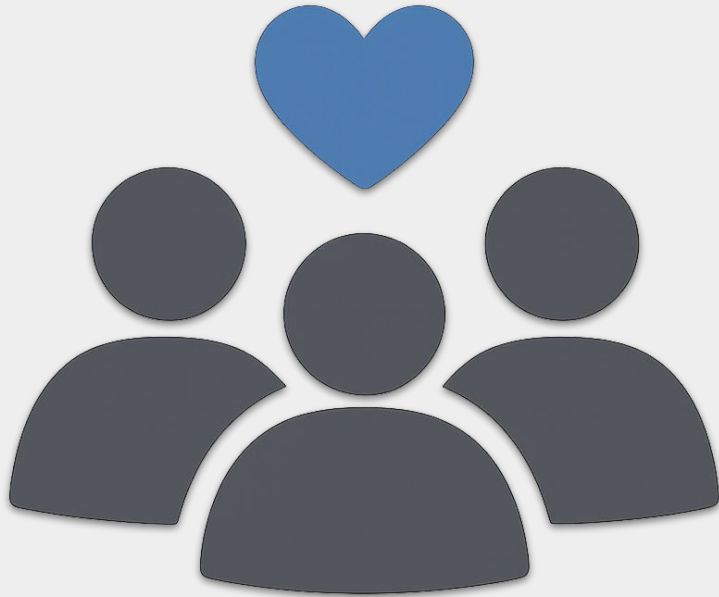


System 5: Creating Conditions for Learning

System #5: Creating Conditions for Learning



Creating Conditions for Learning: When discipline breaks down, instructional time is lost, engagement decreases, and student achievement suffers.



Reflective Questions:

Are disruptions occurring that impact student learning?

What discipline data trends exist to indicate barriers to learning? (Locations, times of day, grade levels, etc.)

Scenario: Classroom Disruptions Are Impeding Instruction

Your school is receiving frequent reports of classroom disruptions across several grade levels. Transitions are chaotic with minimal adult supervision. Teacher morale is declining, office referrals are increasing, and instructional time is being lost. While the principal is working hard to address individual incidents, the problem persists and is affecting student learning.

Practical Actions

Establish a school behavioral team to create consistent expectations and monitor progress.

Provide targeted staff training on classroom management, student engagement and self-regulation.

Establish discipline systems and clear roles and steps for escalation.

Analyze behavior data to identify patterns by classroom, grade level, location, and time of day.

Every Goal Comes Back to the Classroom



Think about your school's quadrant...

High Achievement,
High Growth

Low Achievement,
High Growth

High Achievement,
Low Growth

Low Achievement,
Low Growth

The system that resonates with you...



Grade-Level Instruction



Data-Driven CTMs



Response to Learning



Instructional Walkthroughs



School Culture & Behavior



It all starts in the classroom.

What are teachers doing?

What are students doing?

Ask students, what are you learning?

A goal
without
action steps
is just a wish.



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