

Enhancing Instructional Practices through Walkthrough Tools and Targeted Feedback

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What tool or tools immediately
come to mind when you hear,
“walkthrough?”

Goal = Systemic Coherence for Instructional Leadership



Aligning the Key Levers with TESS to reduce complexity

Arkansas currently operates multiple high-impact leadership initiatives simultaneously, which has created significant "noise" and confusion for school leaders trying to navigate **evaluation requirements** versus **instructional coaching**.

Session Goal: Align frameworks by clearly defining their purpose and "grain size."

- TESS serves as the high-level, systemic framework for support, accountability, and evaluation
- Key Levers serves as the complementary, smaller grain-size tool focused strictly on precise, classroom-level **instructional coaching** and aligning teaching to **High-Quality Instructional Materials** (HQIM)

Together, they reduce complexity and create a single, shared language for effective instructional leadership.

The Power of Walkthrough and Observation Tools



Providing actionable feedback to promote system coherence and instructional alignment

Classroom-Level Tool

TESS

Teacher Excellence and Support System is the "highest grain size" tool, serving as the primary vehicle for teacher observation, individualized feedback, support, and evaluation.

Primary Focus

Captures full-role competencies and professional support. All leaders implement TESS, the statewide system for teacher observation and support.

Key Components

- **Planning & Preparation:** Demonstrating knowledge of content, students, and resources.
- **Classroom Environment:** Creating a safe culture of respect, managing procedures, and establishing high expectations.
- **Instruction:** Engaging students through clear communication, high-level questioning & responsive teaching.
- **Professional Responsibilities:** Reflecting on practice, maintaining records, communicating with families, and growing professionally.

Instruction-Level Tool

Key Levers for Instructional Leadership

The **Key Levers** tool is a "smaller grain size" instrument used for precise, classroom-level instructional coaching. Key Levers is designed to improve teachers instructional delivery using the district identified HQIM.

Primary Focus

Concentrates on content-specific coaching (Math, Literacy, Science) and aligning daily teaching methods to a broader instructional vision. The Key Levers tool is available to all leaders to incorporate into their school wide system for professional learning.

Key Components

- **Instructional Fluency:** Building leader proficiency in providing HQIM-aligned (High-Quality Instructional Materials) feedback.
- **Coaching Quality:** Utilizing observation and feedback forms to track shifts in instructional practice.
- **Student Work Analysis:** Using artifacts and video reviews of coaching cycles to measure growth in student achievement.
- **Teacher Trust:** Measuring the level of trust teachers have in the coaching process via perception surveys.



What is one question you have about how Key Levers differs from TESS, or one way you've seen them used together in your district?

Two tools should feel like one system



WHY THIS MATTERS — from “noise” to one coherent conversation

The redundancy trap

- Leaders experience TESS and Key Levers as two separate classroom visits, two forms, two write-ups.
- Feedback to teachers arrives in two vocabularies that seem to compete.
- Time is the scarcest resource — duplicate observation cycles crowd out coaching.
- **Result: the tools feel like “noise,” not a coherent system.**

The reframe: same lesson, two lenses

TESS is the WHOLE-ROLE lens

the statewide evaluation and support system — “how well is this teacher meeting students’ needs overall?”

Key Levers is the CONTENT-DELIVERY lens

the coaching instrument for Reading, Math, and Science — “where exactly do we go deeper on delivery?”

Same classroom. Same evidence. One coherent conversation.

TESS: Teacher Excellence and Support System



A framework for growth & support across four domains

Planning & Preparation

Demonstrating knowledge of content, students, and resources to design coherent, measurable instruction.

- Content & Pedagogy
- Student Knowledge
- Instructional Outcomes

Instruction

Engaging students through clear communication, high-level questioning, and flexible, responsive teaching.

- Communication Quality
- Questioning Techniques
- Student Engagement

Classroom Environment

Creating a safe culture of respect, managing procedures, and establishing high expectations for learning.

- Culture of Respect
- Classroom Procedures
- Managing Behavior

Professional Responsibilities

Reflecting on practice, maintaining records, communicating with families, and growing professionally.

- Reflective Practice
- Family Communication
- Professional Growth

WHAT IT'S FOR — Core Purpose & Impact

TESS serves as a comprehensive system designed to drive professional growth while ensuring accountability across districts.

1. Answering “how well is this teacher meeting students’ needs overall?”
2. Supporting aligned rewards, including merit pay incentives.

Supporting high-quality curriculum-centered feedback for teachers



Key Levers tools are available for literacy, math and science

Targeting Foundational Skills Instruction: Key Levers for Instructional Leaders



5 Impact Areas:

- Structure for Learning
- Aligned Content
- Direct Instruction
- Student Practice
- Assessment & Differentiation

Ratings:

- **Strong Evidence:** Most look-fors are observed with skillful application.
- **Partial Evidence:** Some look-fors are observed with skillful application.
- **Little Evidence:** Little evidence of look-fors are observed or inconsistent application
- **No Evidence:** No evidence of look-fors are observed

Impact Areas	Indicators
Structure for Learning	1. Students are engaged in the work of the lesson from start to finish; there is a sense of urgency about how time is used. Look Fors: • Students participate in meaningful activities throughout the lesson. • Students volunteer responses and ask appropriate questions. • Routines and transitions require minimal teacher prompting or redirection. • The lesson is well paced; the teacher works to maximize time spent on instructional activities aligned to the learning targets.
	Strong Evidence Partial Evidence Little Evidence No Evidence
Aligned Content	2. Teacher skillfully delivers grade-level appropriate lessons using district-adopted HQIM; lessons reflect grade-level standards. Look Fors: • Teacher skillfully uses the district-adopted curriculum, as appropriate, to teach the lesson. • The lesson is aligned within the scope and sequence, ensuring that students will engage with the full curriculum during the school year. • The objective of the lesson aligns with grade-level standards. ◦ Lesson modifications are made to strengthen the alignment to the state standards, as appropriate. • Students' work shows past and current foundational skills and connections made by teacher and/or students to previously taught skills. • Teacher integrates curriculum-embedded strategies in alignment to the Science of Reading expectations.
	Strong Evidence Partial Evidence Little Evidence No Evidence
Direct Instruction	3. The lesson includes adequate time for aligned teacher instruction which is explicit, clear, and correct. Look Fors: • There is adequate time for instruction. • There is a clear articulation of the objective to students (stated verbally, written on student work, displayed visually, etc.). • Teacher provides clear and accurate pronunciation of sounds (phonemes). • Teacher enhances instruction via the use of visual aids/manipulatives (sound wall, presentation slides, sound chips, etc.). • Teacher provides a clear explanation of the rules for sound and spelling patterns, modeling of blending, segmenting, or other content-specific tasks.
	Strong Evidence Partial Evidence Little Evidence No Evidence
Student Practice	4. The lesson includes adequate time for student practice of targeted skills (i.e. listening, speaking, reading and/or writing). Look Fors: • Teacher provides adequate time for student practice. • There is adequate opportunity for students to practice targeted skill(s) through reading, writing, speaking, and/or listening. • Students use decodable texts¹ to read and/or reread for accuracy/automaticity OR practice through authentic reading experiences. • Students write dictated sentences to practice spelling with accuracy/automaticity OR practice through writing experiences.
	Strong Evidence Partial Evidence Little Evidence No Evidence
Assessment & Differentiation	5. Teacher collects and responds to student data to adjust instruction for all student(s). Look Fors: • Teacher checks for understanding throughout the lesson, and applies strategies in response to student need(s). • A data collection system is in place (checklisting, sampling dictation responses, monitoring of student work, etc.). • Teacher provides on-the-spot feedback, corrections and confirmations of student answers. • There is small group instruction and/or differentiated tasks as appropriate.
	Strong Evidence Partial Evidence Little Evidence No Evidence

¹Decodable texts are sentences or text containing previously taught high-frequency words and sound/spelling patterns

From Literacy to STEM Expansion

Initially focused on state literacy coaches, the Key Levers tool and coaching labs have expanded to support **literacy, math, and science teachers** across districts.

Data-Driven Instructional Feedback

Helps Instructional Leaders gather observational **data to guide curriculum-centered professional learning** and improve the overall quality of feedback on instructional strategies.

Training & Collaboration

Through the DESE sponsored Instructional Leadership Learning Institute and coaching labs, school leaders and district coaches are provided opportunities to practice **feedback conversations and goal setting** alongside a master coach.

The Key Levers for Instructional Leadership



A content-specific observation tool built around 5 Impact Areas

1. Structure for Learning

Are students engaged in the work of the lesson from start to finish? Is there a sense of urgency about how time is used?

2. Aligned Content

Is the teacher skillfully delivering grade-level appropriate lessons using district-adopted, high-quality instructional materials?

3. Direct Instruction

Does the lesson include adequate time for aligned teacher instruction which is explicit, clear, and correct?

4. Student Practice

Is there adequate time built in for students to actually practice the targeted skill, not just watch it modeled?

5. Assessment

Does the teacher collect and respond to student data in the moment, adjusting instruction for the students in front of them?

WHAT IT'S FOR — Core Purpose & Impact

1. Going **deep on how to improve instructional delivery**; the tool a leader uses for coaching.
2. Rated on a 4-point evidence scale (Strong, Partial, Little, No Evidence) to create an **actionable support** rather than a single overall score.

Systemic Coherence: Aligning Our Tools



Mapping instructional coaching directly to TESS domains and components

Key Levers Impact Area	What Key Levers Coaches Look For	Primary TESS Domain Alignment	Corresponding Specific TESS Components
1. Structure for Learning 	Student engagement, efficient routines and transitions, and pacing that maximizes instructional time.	Domain 2: The Classroom Environment (and elements of Domain 3)	2b: Establishing a Culture for Learning 2c: Managing Classroom Procedures 3c: Engaging Students in Learning (Pacing/Structure)
2. Aligned Content 	Skillful use of district-adopted High-Quality Instructional Materials (HQIM) and alignment of the lesson objective to grade-level standards.	Domain 1: Planning & Preparation	1a: Demonstrating Knowledge of Content and Pedagogy 1c: Setting Instructional Outcomes 1d: Demonstrating Knowledge of Resources
3. Teacher Practices / Direct Instruction 	Clear articulation of objectives, purposeful questioning, academic vocabulary, and content-specific modeling (e.g., sound pronunciation in literacy or visual math models).	Domain 3: Instruction	3a: Communicating with Students 3b: Using Questioning and Discussion Techniques
4. Student Practice 	Providing adequate time and opportunity for students to authentically practice targeted skills (reasoning, reading, problem-solving), rather than just watching it modeled. 	Domain 3: Instruction	3c: Engaging Students in Learning (Activities and Assignments / Student Groupings)
5. Assessment & Differentiation 	Checking for understanding, using data collection systems, providing on-the-spot feedback, and adjusting with small group or differentiated tasks.	Domain 3: Instruction (and elements of Domain 1)	3d: Using Assessment in Instruction 3e: Demonstrating Flexibility and Responsiveness 1f: Designing Student Assessments



In one sentence, how would you explain the difference between TESS and Key Levers to a first-year teacher who's nervous about being observed?

How Key Levers sharpens a TESS observation



QUESTION 1 — AIDING OBSERVATION



Content-specific look-fors

TESS asks whether questioning is purposeful; Key Levers tells the leader what that looks like in a math or literacy lesson using the district's HQIM.



Concrete evidence, not impressions

The 4-point evidence scale forces observers to cite what students were doing — the exact artifacts TESS raters need to justify a Domain 3 rating.



Calibration across observers

Shared, content-anchored look-fors reduce rater drift, tightening the calibration accuracy TESS credentialing already requires.



Feedback teachers can act on

Key Levers turns a domain score into a specific next step, raising observer feedback quality on the TESS rubric.

Key Levers Walkthrough – Part of the Whole



QUESTION 2 — REDUCING REDUNDANCY



ONE OBSERVATION

Leader records evidence once, through the Key Levers content lens, during a single visit.



COACHING OUTPUT (formative)

Key Levers profile → this week's specific, content-anchored coaching move.

EVALUATION OUTPUT (summative)

Same evidence maps to TESS Domains 1–3 → documented, defensible ratings.

The redundancy rule: observe once, document at the finest grain, then route the evidence to the purpose. Coaching and evaluation draw from the same well — never separate visits.

Right tool, right purpose — so trust is never traded away



QUESTION 3 — COACHING & EVALUATION

The tools share evidence but keep distinct purposes. Blurring them erodes the teacher trust that coaching depends on.



KEY LEVERS = COACHING

Formative · low-stakes · frequent

- Names one precise, content-specific next step
- Uses artifacts, video, and coaching cycles
- Builds teacher trust via a growth conversation
- Not a summative judgment on the whole teacher



TESS = EVALUATION

Summative · high-stakes · cyclical

- Answers overall role performance across 4 domains
- Anchors credentialing, accountability & support
- Feeds aligned rewards, including merit pay / VAM
- Draws on the very evidence coaching surfaced



The through-line: coaching evidence becomes evaluation evidence, and evaluation data targets the next coaching cycle.

The observation-to-action cycle



THE OPERATING MODEL — one walk, continuous growth



Feedback loop: step 5 restarts step 1 — continuous, low-burden, and producing coaching moves and evaluation evidence from a single walk.

Make it one system in your building



THE ASK — not a new initiative, one shared language

1 Adopt a single observation protocol

Enter every walk with the Key Levers content lens; document once for both purposes.

2 Name the purpose out loud

Tell teachers when a visit is coaching (formative) versus evaluation (summative) — never both silently.

3 Use the crosswalk as a shared script

Give leadership teams the Key Levers → TESS map so feedback speaks one vocabulary.

4 Protect the coaching loop

Re-observe the same Impact Area next cycle; let evaluation data target coaching, not replace it.

One shared language between Key Levers and TESS — so every walk builds better instruction and a defensible record at the same time.



What is the biggest shift you need to make in your own coaching practice to ensure TESS and Key Levers support, rather than compete with, each other?

Re-Cap - TESS and Key Levers, Side by Side



SAME GOAL, DIFFERENT GRAIN SIZE

Feature	TESS	Key Levers
Grain size	Highest — overall teacher quality	Deeper — content-specific delivery
Focus	Planning, Instruction, Learning Environment, Prof Responsibilities	5 Impact Areas incl. Structure for Learning, Aligned Content
Primary use	Coaching, feedback, performance evaluation, aligned rewards (merit pay)	Targeted coaching conversations
Question it answers	<i>“How well is this teacher performing overall?”</i>	<i>“Where exactly do we go deeper on delivery?”</i>
When it's used	Ongoing - as part of the annual performance eval cycle, whole-role	Ongoing — standard practice or in response to a specific need
Merit pay connection	Baseline evaluation; VAM-linked data where available	Student-work artifacts can support eligibility when VAM data isn't linked

Thank you

