Guidance in Creating and Evaluating Literacy Systems and Structures
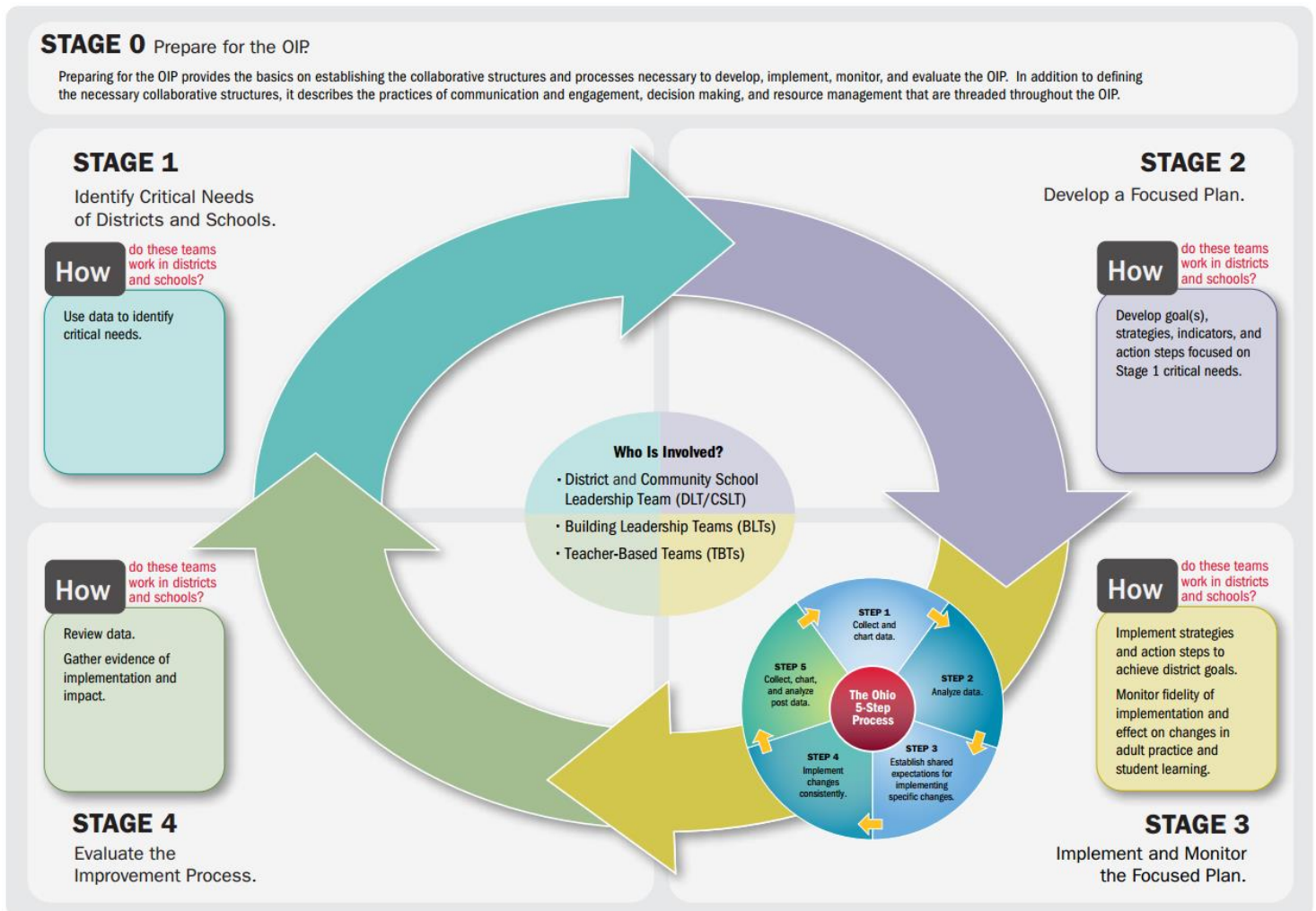
THE OHIO IMPROVEMENT PROCESS (OIP)

The Ohio Improvement Process (OIP) is a five-step ongoing model from the Ohio Department of Education used statewide by Educational Service Centers and State Support Teams. The OIP comprehensive guide for district improvement of instructional practices and student performance can be found at http://education.ohio.gov, keyword Ohio Improvement Process.

To improve the systems and structures surrounding early literacy in your building, consider the following process that is consistent with the OIP:

- **prepare** to engage in the process by establishing a team and structures to carry out improvement
- **identify** strengths and needs
- develop a focused **plan**
- **implement** and **monitor** the plan
- **evaluate** success to inform next steps.

OHIO IMPROVEMENT PROCESS (OIP) VISUAL

STAGE 0 Prepare for the OIP.

Preparing for the OIP provides the basics on establishing the collaborative structures and processes necessary to develop, implement, monitor, and evaluate the OIP. In addition to defining the necessary collaborative structures, it describes the practices of communication and engagement, decision making, and resource management that are threaded throughout the OIP.

STAGE 1
Identify Critical Needs of Districts and Schools.

How do these teams work in districts and schools?

Use data to identify critical needs.

STAGE 2
Develop a Focused Plan.

How do these teams work in districts and schools?

Develop goal(s), strategies, indicators, and action steps focused on Stage 1 critical needs.

Who Is Involved?
- District and Community School Leadership Team (DLT/CSLT)
- Building Leadership Teams (BLTs)
- Teacher-Based Teams (TBTs)

The Ohio 5-Step Process

STEP 1 Collect and chart data.

STEP 2 Analyze data.

STEP 3 Establish shared expectations for implementing specific changes.

STEP 4 Implement changes consistently.

STEP 5 Collect, chart, and analyze post data.

How do these teams work in districts and schools?

Review data.

Gather evidence of implementation and impact.

STAGE 4
Evaluate the Improvement Process.

How do these teams work in districts and schools?

Implement strategies and action steps to achieve district goals.

Monitor fidelity of implementation and effect on changes in adult practice and student learning.

STAGE 3
Implement and Monitor the Focused Plan.

Source: Ohio Department of Education, 2012

The following sections describe these steps in further detail and include activities to be completed by school- or district-level leadership teams.

Note: If your building is already engaged in the OIP, use your existing leadership team and invite additional literacy experts to assist in developing literacy-focused strategies to embed into your existing OIP plan.

STEP ZERO: PREPARE TO ENGAGE IN THE PROCESS

To engage in the process, first establish a team and structures intended to carry out your plans. The OIP refers to this initial action as "step zero", **and includes an important reminder to ensure that systems of communication, engagement, decision-making and resource management are set up and functioning well to support successful changes.**

Your team should aim to achieve the following objectives as you prepare to change systems and structures:

- promote awareness and commitment for literacy;
- strengthen understanding of what it takes to provide quality early learning experiences for every student;
- ensure hearts and minds of those involved support the mission for reading; and
- grow internal capacity and sustainability for systems and structures that support literacy.

Getting Started:
Identify the parties who will participate on your team to improve literacy. District leaders, school leaders, teachers, students, families and community members are all important stakeholders who support and are impacted by children's literacy. This team will be critical in identifying where you are, where you want to be and how you will get there on the literacy journey.

Leading and Managing Change
To improve the systems and structures in any area, it is critical to know how to lead change, manage change and navigate the stumbling blocks that emerge along the way. Through his study of leadership and change management, John Kotter of Harvard University estimates that 70 percent of organizations fail to execute the strategies they intend to carry out (Kotter International, 2015). However, he has found that the organizations that succeed in managing change do so in systematic ways that can be replicated in any organization. Following is an overview of Kotter's process for driving successful change.

- **Establish a sense of urgency:** "By far the biggest mistake people make when trying to change organizations is to plunge ahead without establishing a high enough sense of urgency in fellow managers and employers" (p. 5). As Kotter suggests, people are unwilling to make the necessary sacrifices for meaningful change unless they truly see the value in the proposed transformation. The change effort must begin with a clear, compelling case for why.

- **Create a powerful guiding coalition:** "This group rarely includes all of the most senior people...but in the most successful cases, the coalition is always powerful—in terms of formal titles, information and expertise, reputations and relationships, and the capacity for leadership" (p. 6). In establishing a team to propel the new initiative forward, it is important to consider not

only job titles, but content expertise, relationships and leadership abilities among individuals who may not currently serve in formal leadership positions.

- **Develop a clear vision:** "Without an appropriate vision, a transformation effort can easily dissolve into a list of confusing, incompatible, and time-consuming projects that go in the wrong direction or nowhere at all" (p. 7). Kotter recommends having a detailed plan in place for achieving desired outcomes through the change process.

- **Communicate the vision:** "Communication comes in both words and deeds. The latter is generally the most powerful form" (p. 10). Having well-organized, formal communication strategies in place is essential for making sure everyone understands and supports the vision.

- **Remove obstacles:** "New initiatives fail far too often when employees, even though they embrace a new vision, feel disempowered by huge obstacles in their paths" (p. 10). In *Leading Change*, Kotter discusses roadblocks caused by elements of the organizational structure, as well as those that exist in people's minds. An example of the former would be the expectation that teachers plan collaboratively, without providing the appropriate scheduling. The latter might involve situations such as teachers feeling that they have not been given enough support to implement a new program or process that supports early literacy.

- **Generate short-term wins:** "Most people won't go on the long march unless they see compelling evidence within six to 18 months that the journey is producing expected results" (p.11). As educators, families and others dive into uncharted territory, recognition of their efforts and/or support is critical for ongoing success. Examples of short-term wins include preventing retention for students through summer school intervention and successful communication with families.

- **Don't declare victory too early:** "The premature victory celebration stops all momentum. And then powerful forces associated with tradition take over" (p. 13). While seemingly contradictory to the previous step, this step highlights the nuances involved in celebrating success without sending the message that the work is done.

- **Anchor the change in the culture:** "Change sticks only when it becomes 'the way we do things around here'" (p. 14). The power of tradition is strong, and it is natural to feel tempted to go back to what was familiar and comfortable. If your team wants change to "stick", you must work to create a culture of a new tradition.

Now that you've completed the first important step of **preparation**, it's time to carry the work forward through the next steps of the OIP.

STEP 1: IDENTIFY

Step 1 involves an in-depth exploration of the current state of early literacy, including classroom, school and community resources and practices. One tool to do this is a Performance Level Descriptor (PLD) around different areas for literacy support.

A PLD is a high-level rubric that describes progressive levels of mastery over a period of time, and it is used here to gauge progress toward successful early literacy systems and structures.
With your team, use the following PLD as an assessment to determine where your school or district falls in the areas of:
- compliance
- community connections
- school resources
- school policies and practices
- classroom practices
- data

With your team, assign a score to each section, then document evidence that explains each score awarded. Scores denote the following:

1–*Limited (Needs extensive support)*: Data collection methods, stakeholder buy-in and/or school and district practices do not meet our needs.

3–*Moderate (Needs moderate support)*: Data collection methods, stakeholder buy-in and/or school and district practices are nearly where they need to be but lack in some areas.

5–*Distinguished (Preserve/maintain current supports)*: Data collection methods, stakeholder buy-in and/or school and district practices are exceptional.

Take careful time with Step 1 because it will lay the foundation for all of your early literacy improvement work.

STEP 1 ACTIVITY: PERFORMANCE LEVEL DESCRIPTOR FOR CHARACTERISTICS OF LITERACY SYSTEMS AND STRUCTURES

A Vision for Literacy: The following performance level descriptor asks teams of teachers, school leaders and community members to consider aspects of systems and structures that should be improved, supported, maintained, and preserved. Teachers and students will experience greater success when schools ensure that the right people, the right practices, the right measures, and the right messages all align to support early literacy for students.

Use the following PLD to circle the appropriate score in each section, and write your evidence in the blank spaces in the table.

Expectations, Systems and Structures	5–Distinguished Preserve/ Maintain	4	3–Moderate Needs moderate support	2	1–Limited Needs extensive support
Meet all state requirements for compliance in terms of teacher qualifications, assessment administration, promotion, reporting and communication.	• Understand and can accurately articulate state requirements, and effectively employ timing, resources and knowledge base to accomplish compliance in a way that is meaningful for the school system. • Accurately identify and remedy breakdowns in requirement areas (to the left). • Distinguish between priority and supporting goals for literacy compliance based on district/school strengths and areas of concern.		• Understand and can accurately articulate state requirements, with minor challenges in implementation or execution of state requirements such as timing, resources and knowledge base. • See the connection between requirement areas and successful early literacy supports. • Sometimes struggle to distinguish between priority and supporting goals for literacy compliance.		• Recognize that state compliance is important and valuable, but currently at a stand-still in implementation due to timing, resources and knowledge base. • May not be aware of all connections between specific compliance areas and successful early literacy supports. • Struggle to distinguish between priority and supporting goals for compliance.

Expectations, Systems and Structures	5–Distinguished Preserve/ Maintain	4	3–Moderate Needs moderate support	2	1–Limited Needs extensive support
Create and sustain **community connections** with organizations that can support early literacy.	• Work in collaboration with area preschools in order to align and communicate goals, scope and sequence to build a quality early literacy foundation leading toward success in K–3 and beyond. • Align community organizations with district efforts where all parties use common terminology and support a common goal for early literacy. • Coordinate after-school, weekend, or summer programming with community service providers, libraries, universities or service/faith-based organizations in order to leverage additional supports and resources to build literacy competency for students and families.		• Aware of area preschools and program features related to literacy, but there is little collaboration to establish cohesive goals. • Aware of community organizations, but have not attempted to coordinate or initiate the alignment of literacy efforts to build cohesiveness. • Have set goals for coordinating partnerships and programming with community service providers, libraries, universities or service/faith-based organizations in order to leverage additional supports and resources, but have yet to implement them.		• Unaware of area preschools' literacy content for young children and have made little or no effort to collaborate. • Unaware of and unconnected with community organizations; need to initiate the alignment of literacy efforts to build cohesiveness. • May have goals for community connections but they do not relate directly to reading and literacy, even though they may be supportive of families in other ways.

Expectations, Systems and Structures	5–Distinguished Preserve/ Maintain	4	3–Moderate Needs moderate support	2	1–Limited Needs extensive support
Leverage **school resources** to ensure efficient, effective practices surrounding reading instruction and intervention.	• Teachers understand and can describe the curriculum in terms of classroom learning targets, and effectively use curriculum supports to meet all students' needs. • Have ample resources to support teaching reading: mentor teachers, literacy coaches, school and classroom libraries, technology, etc. • Have an effective volunteer program with appropriate processes and volunteers. • Have researched and secured additional funding through various resources to effectively support literacy improvement at either the district, building or classroom level via title money, grants, etc. • There is a clear commitment—proven by actions—from senior district leadership to provide educators with the resources they need to support early literacy.		• Teachers understand and can accurately describe the curriculum; may have difficulty using or accessing curriculum supports to meet students' needs. • Have some resources for support teaching reading through mentors, coaches, libraries, and technology, but lack others. • Volunteer program is in place, but struggles due to difficult processes or a lack of volunteers. • Aware of additional funding to support literacy improvement at the district, building or classroom level via title money, grants, etc. but have not had the time, staff, or knowledge base in order to secure and finalize funding. • There may be a clear commitment from senior district leadership to provide educators with the resources they need to support early literacy, but it may lack action at this point.		• Teachers know a strong reading curriculum is important, but need assistance with identifying holes in the curriculum or how to provide additional supports to meet students' needs. • Have a limited number of prepared mentors, coaches, libraries, technology, etc. to support reading instruction. • Have no volunteer processes and programs in place, or no available volunteer base. • Unaware of additional funding available to support literacy improvement at either the district, building or classroom level via title money, grants, etc. • Actions and commitment of senior district leadership to provide educators with the resources they need to support early literacy is lacking.

Expectations, Systems and Structures	5–Distinguished Preserve/ Maintain	4	3–Moderate Needs moderate support	2	1–Limited Needs extensive support
Align **school policies and practices** to support literacy initiatives.	• Process for identification of students not on track is accurate and provides enough time for students to receive intervention in a consistent and appropriate time frame. • Encourage, support, and require effective teacher team collaboration within and across grade levels as well as across intervention support services. • Have prioritized literacy and aligned resources including financial resources to support high-quality professional development. • Have acknowledged and adjusted the school day structure to support literacy processes that are optimal for all students, including after-school and summer supports. • Communication with families is timely, topic sensitive, and responsive to the needs of families. The school and families are partners in a child's education. Families openly communicate successes and challenges with school staff.		• Process for identification of students not on track most of the time is efficient and reliable. However, there are some students who do not receive adequate intervention. • Encourage, support, and require effective teacher team collaboration within and across grade levels, but not across intervention support services. • Have prioritized literacy, but maybe not with high-quality professional development. • Structure of days and time in school is effective for all students, but considerations for after school and summer programs may need improvement. • Communication with families and outreach are in play, but they may not be timely, topic sensitive or responsive to the needs of all families.		• Process for identification of students not on track is not working. Students are not receiving adequate intervention supports. • Support for effective teacher team collaboration within/across grade levels and intervention support services is lacking. • Currently literacy is not a priority for the district or building. • Structure of days and time in school does not consider needs of all students, and considerations for after school or summer programs need improvement. • Communication with families is inconsistent, and requires improvement around messaging and effective methods of outreach.

Expectations, Systems and Structures	5–Distinguished Preserve/ Maintain	4	3–Moderate Needs moderate support	2	1–Limited Needs extensive support
Align **classroom practices** and **professional development** opportunities with reading instruction priorities, all with strong research-based support.	• Use of formative instructional practices is in play and has improved instruction. • Effectively incorporates: phonemic awareness, phonics, fluency, vocabulary, comprehension, and writing. • Literacy is interdisciplinary at all grade levels. • Teachers communicate with families in effective and responsive methods in order to engage families in the learning process. They use e-mail, text, social media, personal phone conversations, etc. to effectively meet families where they are. • School-wide culture that fosters sharing and recruiting feedback between teachers, related to teaching successes and approaches to challenges. • Effective vertical teams are used to create a continuum of expectations and cross-grade level consistency in instructional approaches.		• Formative instructional practices have improved instruction in some areas, but may require an additional focus on early literacy. • Instruction incorporates: phonemic awareness, phonics, fluency, vocabulary, comprehension, writing but may be inconsistent. • Literacy is interdisciplinary in some grade levels. • Teachers communicate with families in effective and responsive methods in order to engage families in the learning process. However, they generally rely on one standard mode of messaging to reach all families. • Some teachers share and recruit feedback related to teaching successes and approaches to challenges, but this culture varies across the board. • Effective vertical teams are sometimes used to create a continuum of expectations and there is less cross-grade level consistency in instructional approaches.		• Formative instructional practices are known about and accessible, but rarely implemented. • Instruction does not incorporate a balanced approach to phonemic awareness, phonics, fluency, vocabulary, comprehension, and writing. • Literacy may be interdisciplinary in some cases, but not in all. • Teachers have difficulty communicating student learning and progress to families, and need to try new communications strategies. • Teachers do not feel comfortable sharing and recruiting feedback related to teaching successes and approaches to challenges. • Vertical teaming rarely or never happens; there is little consistency in cross-grade level instructional approaches.

Expectations, Systems and Structures	5–Distinguished Preserve/ Maintain	4	3–Moderate Needs moderate support	2	1–Limited Needs extensive support
Accurately use **data** to identify successes and challenges, make meaningful adjustments, and impact student reading and writing.	• Teachers accurately assess student reading through high quality diagnostic assessments that allow teachers to understand students' reading competencies and pinpoint areas of challenge or need for improvement in order to make adjustments to instruction from valid and reliable documentation. • Collect and organize classroom and school-wide data for decision-making on a large scale. • Diagnostic data tools inform instruction around literacy for phonemic awareness, phonics, fluency, vocabulary, comprehension and writing.		• Teachers assess student reading through high quality assessments, however the assessments do not provide enough clarity or information to guide instruction based off assessment documentation, or information is difficult to align with specific targets related to instructional practices. • Collect classroom and school wide data, but may lack next steps for effective use on a large scale. • Diagnostic data tools inform instruction around literacy, but may not be targeted in all specific areas.		• Teachers lack accurate assessments for student reading, and the assessments do not provide enough clarity or information to guide instruction based off assessment documentation. • Collection and organization of classroom and school wide data lacks organization and utility. • Diagnostic data tools are used, but not to their fullest extent to inform instruction around literacy for all specific areas.

Now, respond to the data gathered through the PLD review process.

It is recommended that team members reflect on the results of the assessment on their own and return ready to contribute their responses to the group. Then, as a group, discuss the following questions and look for commonalities and discrepancies.

- Why did you assign these scores?
- What stood out to you?
- What strengths do you observe?
- Where do you see areas for growth?
- What emerges as potential priority areas?
- What did you find as commonalities among your fellow team members?
- Where did you differ in responses?

Notes:

_____
_____
_____
_____

Remember in your system-wide planning not to neglect individualizing the process for students and for teachers. The other tools below from Battelle for Kids' Formative Instructional Practices (FIP) efforts can be used to help strengthen school and district-wide processes that focus on individualizing instruction. A short description of how to use each of them is located below.

A Protocol for Reflecting on Student Work (Appendix A)
Use this protocol with step-by-step instructions for a teacher team to reflect collaboratively on student work for meaningful insights and conclusions.

Using the Six Sources of Influence to Guide Your Work (Appendix B)
Use the graphic organizer to brainstorm ways to use six sources of influence to help teachers be successful in learning and applying what they've learned to their practice.
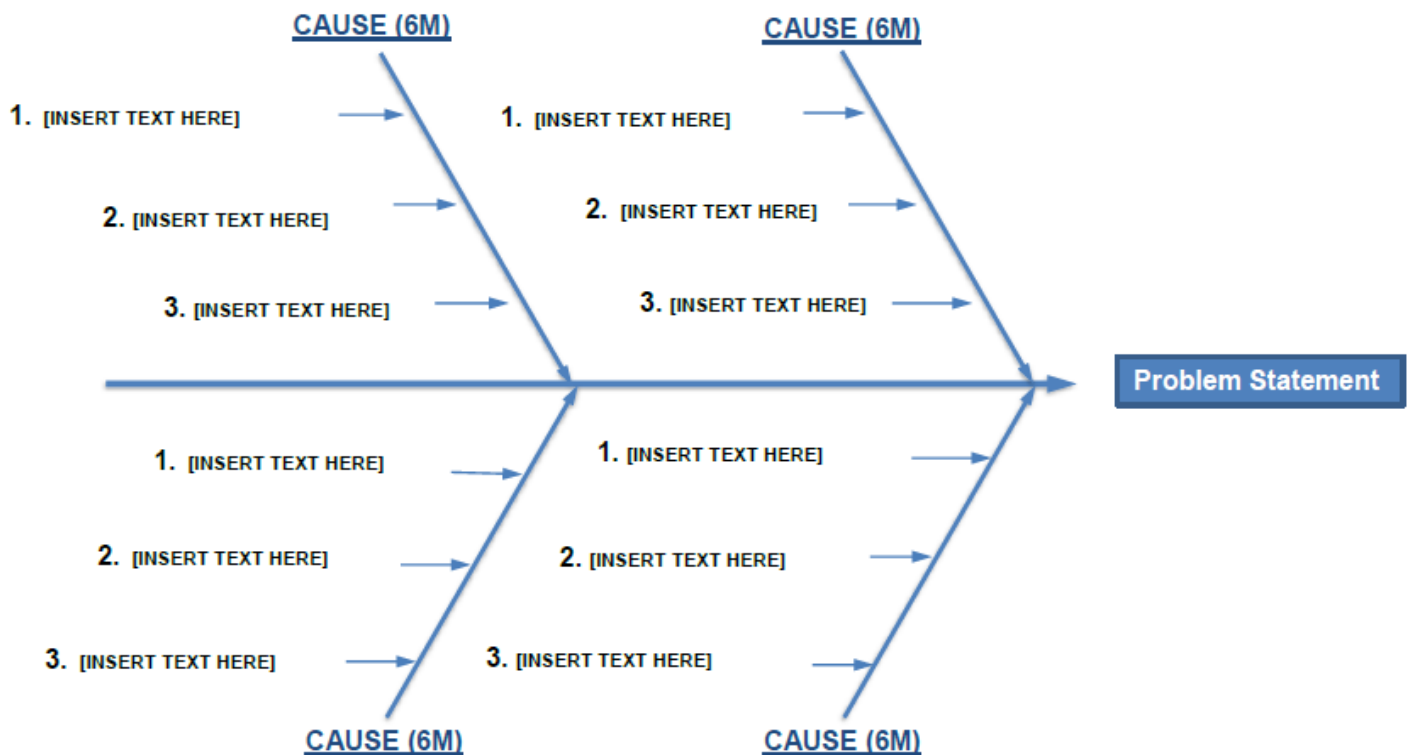
SWOT Analysis Diagram (Appendix C)
The acronym *SWOT* stands for "Strengths, Weaknesses, Opportunities, and Threats." Use this document to brainstorm attributes in the appropriate quadrant.

Fishbone Diagram

This diagram looks like the skeleton of a fish and is designed to help identify cause-and-effect relationships and pinpoint challenges. Write a problem statement at the head, and causes based on the 6 Ms next to each of the ribs. The 6Ms comprise the following:

- **Material**: Objects involved in the problem, causes, or process (e.g., supplies, classroom space, library resources)
- **Measurement**: Measurement tools and data quality (e.g., report cards, staff evaluations, assessment data)
- **Man**: Anyone involved in the problem, causes or process (e.g., school or district employees, students, families, school board)
- **Method**: How a process is performed, and the specific requirements involved (e.g., rules, regulations, policies, procedures, laws)
- **Machine**: Equipment, tools or technology required to perform work tasks (e.g., computers, buses, audio-visual equipment)
- **Mother Nature**: The conditions in which the data, problem or process operates (e.g., time, weather, location, school culture)

CAUSE (6M)   CAUSE (6M)

1. [INSERT TEXT HERE]   1. [INSERT TEXT HERE]

2. [INSERT TEXT HERE]   2. [INSERT TEXT HERE]

3. [INSERT TEXT HERE]   3. [INSERT TEXT HERE]

Problem Statement

1. [INSERT TEXT HERE]   1. [INSERT TEXT HERE]

2. [INSERT TEXT HERE]   2. [INSERT TEXT HERE]

3. [INSERT TEXT HERE]   3. [INSERT TEXT HERE]

CAUSE (6M)   CAUSE (6M)

5 Whys Analysis (Appendix E)

The 5 Whys analysis is a method in which the question "Why?" is repeated five times, with the goal of uncovering the true root cause of a problem. Write a specific, clearly defined problem at the top of the page. Next, ask why the problem occurred, and write that down below the problem. Repeat this step until the root cause has been identified.

▼ **1st Why**	
[INSERT TEXT HERE]	
▼ **2nd Why**	
[INSERT TEXT HERE]	
▼ **3rd Why**	
[INSERT TEXT HERE]	
▼ **4th Why**	
[INSERT TEXT HERE]	
▼ **5th Why**	
[INSERT TEXT HERE]	

STEP 2: PLAN

In Step 2, you will begin to create a plan for literacy improvement.

Based on your PLD and responses, what are the three most important priorities for literacy improvement that your school can focus on over the next year? These priorities should move your district towards an improved literacy process for all students. As your team makes these priorities, think about your commitment to stick with them for six months, and then a year, to overcome barriers and make change. Write down what you will do to stick with that commitment in the future.

Priorities	Our Commitment Within 6 months	Our Commitment Within 1 Year
1.		
2.		
3.		

Also consider how to effectively communicate your plan within to families. Keep the following in mind:
- Help your audience connect to the purposes of the Third Grade Reading Guarantee:
  - Establishing a foundation for lifelong learning
  - Ensuring all students learn to read
  - Providing additional supports for students who need it
  - Preparing teachers to support early readers
- Use the principal and teacher as the messenger for frequent, face-to-face conversations
- Engage all families and help them get involved
- Explain the supports
- Rely on communications tools from the Ohio Department of Education by visiting http://education.ohio.gov and searching keyword: *Third Grade Reading Guarantee:*
  - Parent Road Maps
  - Fact Sheet
  - Sample Newsletter Text
  - Infographic

STEP 3: IMPLEMENT AND MONITOR

The following chart can be used to define specific actions that must be carried out to achieve the selected priorities, assign responsibilities to individuals and track progress. It is recommended that the team meet for periodic check-ins to discuss the status of the work.

Fill in the table below to define your plan:

Task	Person Responsible	Date Due	Status (Not Started, In Progress, Completed)

STEP 4: EVALUATE

Your team should re-assess after six months and one year to evaluate each of your priorities, as well as your process for the team, communications and systems involved with this work.

Utilize the PLD for Assessing Focus Areas for Early Literacy to monitor progress. The OIP recommends reviewing building- and classroom-level data, and gathering evidence of implementation and impact.

Use the table below to assess the impact you have made on your priorities.

Priorities	Impact *Last 6 Months*	Impact *Last Year*
1.		
2.		
3.		
Process: Team, Communications, and System	**Lessons Learned Last 6 Months**	**Lessons Learned Last Year**