

Implementation Benchmarks

Guidance Document



COLORADO
Department of Education

Overview of Implementation Benchmarks

What are Implementation Benchmarks?

Implementation Benchmarks are tools for pacing and monitoring the roll-out of a strategy or initiative. Implementation Benchmarks name *specific, measurable adult actions or systems that are key to the implementation of a strategy or initiative*, and they highlight major milestones for phases in a significant or system-wide change, or points in the roll-out by which changes will be implemented. Setting these benchmarks intentionally serves two purposes:

1. Strong implementation benchmarks anchor progress monitoring that effectively gauges whether the planned strategy is being implemented with fidelity (i.e., as it was intended).
2. Strong benchmarks can also be used as touchpoints from which to backwards plan action steps in the improvement planning process.

While Implementation Benchmarks are often classroom-focused (emphasizing student-facing actions), they can also be culture- or systems-focused, as schools and districts implement strategies that support student outcomes in a variety of ways.

Sample Implementation Benchmark

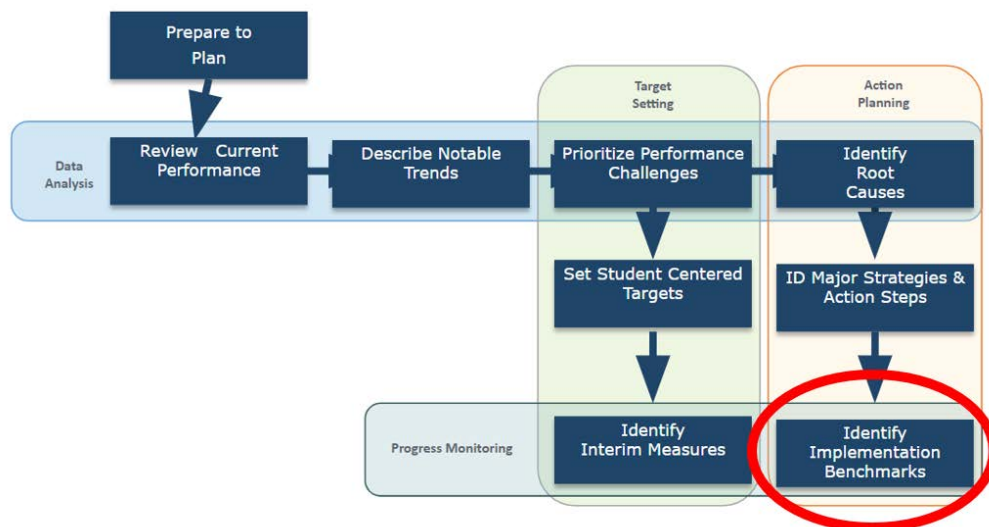
By September 15, an audit of daily lesson plans will show that 70% of teachers will be incorporating language objectives into their daily lesson plans.

Why are they important? What is their role in Improvement Planning?

Since Implementation Benchmarks enable us to monitor whether implementation is happening as planned, they can help us identify issues or gaps in implementation before these gaps begin to influence student outcomes. When benchmarks are missed or when challenges arise in meeting them, this signals a need to step back, reflect on the plan as a whole and make mid-course corrections, if these are necessary. Rather than waiting for student outcome data to confirm that progress is not being made, *using missed benchmarks as an opportunity to adjust improvement efforts enables schools to respond nimbly to their ever-evolving contexts to ensure the strongest possible outcomes for students.*

How do Implementation Benchmarks fit into the UIP?

In the Unified Improvement Plan (UIP), Implementation Benchmarks identify key milestones in the implementation of a Major Improvement Strategy. They should be set after a comprehensive data analysis and reflection, the selection of Priority Performance Challenges



and associated Root Causes, and the adoption of a Major Improvement Strategy to address the root cause. Implementation Benchmarks, together with the Interim Measures of expected student outcomes, make it possible to progress monitor the roll-out of the Major Improvement Strategy and to evaluate whether that strategy is having the intended effect on student outcomes.

What do Implementation Benchmarks tell us? What do they NOT tell us?

Monitoring well-formulated Implementation Benchmarks will tell us whether our strategy or initiative roll-out is proceeding as planned. They do *not* tell us whether the changes being made are affecting student outcomes or if the strategy is necessarily succeeding. Moreover, while meeting Implementation Benchmarks can give a strong indication of how well implementation is progressing, it is crucial that these benchmarks are well-planned and well-designed in order to give the most accurate information about the progress of implementation. While Implementation Benchmarks can't necessarily tell us whether our strategy is having the intended effect on student outcomes, they *can* sometimes serve as leading measures; if benchmarks are missed, it is increasingly likely that student outcomes *will not* be affected as planned, since missed benchmarks will indicate that the strategy itself is not being implemented with fidelity.

How are Implementation Benchmarks different from Interim Measures? From Action steps?

Implementation Benchmarks can sometimes be confused for two other elements of the improvement planning process—Interim Measures and Action Steps—but they differ from each in crucial ways. The table below briefly summarizes the difference between the three improvement planning elements.

	<i>Interim Measures</i>	<i>Implementation Benchmarks</i>	<i>Action Steps</i>
<i>What they look at...</i>	Student Outcomes	Adult Actions and/or Systems	Specific steps or tasks that need to happen in order to reach benchmarks.
<i>What they tell us...</i>	Measure how student performance outcomes are changing (and can measure how successful the strategy being implemented is)	Measure whether strategy is being implemented as planned	May simply list actions (i.e., provide a checklist of tasks, but not a metric or measurement.)
<i>Example</i>	By December 15, student performance on iReady will show that 35% of students who initially tested below grade level will have reached proficiency.	By September 15, an audit of daily lesson plans will show that 70% of teachers will be incorporating language objectives into their daily lesson plans.	A progress monitoring tracking system will be rolled out to all teachers on August 25th.



Creating Strong Implementation Benchmarks

In order to provide strong and meaningful touchpoints that can be reliably used to gauge the roll-out of a strategy, Implementation Benchmarks must be carefully crafted. A strong Implementation Benchmark identified a task or action, an actor, a date, and a target measurement. Leaving out any of this information will make it difficult or impossible to use the benchmark to gauge progress, or to follow up on missed benchmarks. E.g., if a benchmark that lacks a target measurement, it will be difficult to determine whether that benchmark has been met or missed. If a benchmark lacks an actor, it will be difficult to determine who need additional support in their role in implementing a strategy.

Prerequisites

The following elements must be in place before strong Implementation Benchmarks can be created:

- A clear strategy or initiative that is focused and within the locus of control of the school.
- A careful enumeration of the different steps needed to implement the strategy effectively (i.e., what things need to be created or completed).
- A timeline that is backwards-planned from desired date of full implementation.

Criteria for Success

Implementation Benchmarks should include the following information:

- **WHAT** will be done
- **WHO** will do it (this may not be explicitly stated in the IB, but should be obvious)
- **WHEN** it will be done
- **HOW** it will be measured (i.e., how you will know it was done).

***Note:** including a metric by which progress can be gauged is crucial to identifying whether implementation is on track, or, if off track, how far from the target the current state is.*

The frame below shows one example of how to construct a benchmark that meets the Criteria for Success.

Sample Implementation Benchmark "Frame"

Frame	Example
By [date] , [tool] will show that X% of [who] are successfully [action]	By the end of the first quarter , an audit of daily lesson plans will show that 95% of teachers are successfully <i>incorporating language objectives in their lesson plans.</i>

See the [Appendix](#) of this document for a list of examples and non-examples of Implementation Benchmarks.

Using Implementation Benchmarks

Setting a series of Implementation Benchmarks

In order to measure whether or not the implementation of a strategy is progressing appropriately, Implementation Benchmarks must be carefully planned and sequenced. Benchmarks should build on each other progressively throughout the plan period. A well-crafted series of benchmarks makes it possible to track incremental progress towards a final goal, as they describe multiple checkpoints along the way.

The following chart gives an example of how a series of aligned Implementation Benchmarks can be used to track the roll-out of a Major Improvement Strategy.

Example: Series of Implementation Benchmarks

Aligned to Major Improvement Strategy: Focused teacher development in embedded ELD.

By September 1st	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> 50% of teachers will be incorporating language objectives into their daily lesson plans
By September 15th	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> 70% of teachers will be incorporating language objectives into their daily lesson plans
By October 30th	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> 95+% of teachers will be incorporating language objectives into their daily lesson plans. <i>Monitor monthly for the rest of the school year.</i> 40% of teachers will be assessing daily language objectives in their exit tickets.
By December 15th	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> 65% of teachers will be assessing daily language objectives in their exit tickets. 30% of teachers will be analyzing student performance on language objectives in exit tickets during their weekly coaching meetings and adjusting upcoming instruction.
By February 15th	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> 90+% of teachers will be assessing daily language objectives in their exit tickets. <i>Monitor monthly for the rest of the year.</i> 60% of teachers will be analyzing student performance on language objectives in exit tickets during their weekly coaching meetings and adjusting upcoming instruction.
By April 30	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> 90+% of teachers will be analyzing student performance on language objectives in exit tickets during their weekly coaching meetings and adjusting upcoming instruction. <i>Monitor monthly for the rest of the year.</i>
April 30-EOY	<i>Continue monitoring benchmarks through end of year.</i>

When setting a series of Implementation Benchmarks, consider the following guiding questions:

- What are the different elements or strands of your strategy?** Consider writing a series of benchmarks for each element. Consider also whether the elements should themselves be sequenced or whether they can run simultaneously.

- **In order to achieve your student outcome goals, how quickly will the strategy need to be implemented?** *Carefully backwards-plan your timeline from your intended outcomes. E.g., if I want this strategy to impact student outcomes this year, then teachers need to implement these practices by X date. In order to do so, we'll need to see Y% progress on implementation each week/month.*
- **How complicated is the change being made?** *The complexity or difficulty of the change will inform your timeline for benchmarks.*
- **Will progress most likely be linear, or irregular?** *E.g., In changing teacher practice, will it be easier to get the first 50% of teachers on board, or the last 50%?*
- As always, keep in mind your existing **academic calendar**, especially any breaks, heavy testing weeks, or other events that may impact your and/or your staff's capacity.

There is always a certain amount of well-informed guesswork that goes into setting benchmarks, and they may need to be adjusted during the year (especially when things are progressing more rapidly than expected). Nonetheless, investing the time in carefully planning and sequencing those benchmarks at the outset provides the strongest foundation for effective progress monitoring throughout the year.

Progress monitoring

Effective Implementation Benchmarks are not just well-planned and well-formulated -- they must be actively and regularly monitored in order to drive progress towards the effective implementation of a strategy.

- **Implementation Benchmarks that are not met (or that are met late) indicate that the strategy is not being implemented as planned**, and a strategy that is not implemented well or completely will likely not have the desired effect on student outcomes. For example, missed benchmarks may signal the need for additional coaching touchpoints; these can help even out performance when there are a handful of teachers who need additional support. In situations where a majority of teachers have not met an expected benchmark, it may be wise to invest time in more formal professional development to build teacher capacity system-wide.
- **Use Implementation Benchmarks and Interim Measures together to determine when course corrections are necessary.** If Implementation Benchmarks are all being met but Interim Measures show little or no impact on student outcomes, schools should make course corrections as necessary to ensure that student outcomes will be effectively improved, and annual targets will be met. In some situations, this may mean adopting a new strategy, if the original strategy is not impacting student outcomes despite being implemented with fidelity.
- **Continue monitoring progress after Implementation Benchmarks have been met.** Maintain the use of any progress monitoring trackers even after benchmarks have been met. At regular intervals (e.g., bi-weekly, during regular staff meetings, etc.), review the trackers to determine whether performance is still meeting these benchmarks, or whether it has dropped off. A drop off in performance may indicate a need to recommit to or re-train in the benchmark task.

Progress Monitoring using Implementation Benchmarks

The following elements are crucial to ensuring that Implementation Benchmarks have the intended impact:

1. **A timeline for Benchmark monitoring.** Make a concrete plan for how and when actual school data will be measured against these benchmarks.
2. **A progress monitoring system.** Establish a system for tracking progress on those benchmarks.
3. **Planned touchpoints to reflect on progress.** Designating periodic step-backs (whether these are completed individually or during team meetings) to observe and reflect on progress towards these benchmarks will enable schools to make informed and timely decisions about needed interventions or course corrections during the school year.



Appendix

Examples and Non-Examples of Implementation Benchmarks

Example	Why this is a strong Implementation Benchmark
By September 15, an audit of daily lesson plans will show that 70% of teachers will be incorporating language objectives into their daily lesson plans.	<i>This example clearly identifies an adult action and actor, specifies how it will be measured, includes a target for expected progress, and names a date on which this action will be measured.</i>
By August 20, 85% of teachers have successfully used the new MTSS data collection system to track instructional supports offered to at least five of their students.	<i>Although this benchmark is not student-facing, it does describe a measurable set of adult actions; meeting this benchmark will be a strong indication that a strategy that will impact student performance is being well-implemented.</i>
Beginning August 15, all students have a 1:1 meeting with their advisor every week, as reported in an internal Advisory Tracker.	<i>While this statement could be seen as measuring student experience, it is in fact an Implementation Benchmark rather than an Interim Measure, since the student experience it measures is not a student performance outcome.</i>

Non-Example	Why this is a non-example	Revised Example
A progress monitoring tracking system will be rolled out to all teachers on August 25th.	<i>This is an action step, rather than an Implementation Benchmark. It names a task necessary for the roll-out of the strategy, but this is not something that can be meaningfully measured to gauge implementation.</i>	By September 15th, 85% of coaches will be updating the progress monitoring tracker at least once per week.
By December 15, student performance on iReady will show that 35% of students who initially tested below grade level will have reached proficiency.	<i>Because this measures student outcomes, rather than adult actions, this is an Interim Measure, rather than an Implementation Benchmark.</i>	By the end of the second quarter, classroom observations will show that 75% of teachers are successfully implementing Tier 1 instructional practices in their classrooms.
Teachers will get PD on Close Reading practices in September.	<i>While this is an adult action, it doesn't have a clear target or metric by which the progress of the plan can be measured.</i>	By October 30, 90% of teachers will be incorporating Close Reading cycles in their lesson plans at least once per week.

Additional Resources

[Four Domains for Rapid School Improvement: An Implementation Framework](#) (National Implementation Research Network)

Easterling, D., & Metz, A. (2016). [Getting Real With Strategy: Insights From Implementation Science](#). The Foundation Review, 8(2). <https://doi.org/10.9707/1944-5660.1301>