Implementation Milestones

Guidance Document

Overview of Implementation Milestones

What are Implementation Milestones?

Implementation Milestones (formerly "Implementation Benchmarks") are tools for pacing and monitoring the roll-out of a strategy or initiative. Implementation Milestones 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 milestones intentionally serves two purposes:

1. Strong implementation milestones anchor progress monitoring that effectively gauges whether the planned strategy is being implemented with fidelity (i.e., as it was intended).

2. Strong milestones can also be used as touchpoints from which to backwards plan action steps in the improvement planning process.

Implementation Milestones may be classroom-focused (emphasizing student-facing actions) or culture- or systems-focused, as schools and districts implement strategies that support student outcomes in a variety of ways.

> **Sample Implementation Milestone:** *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 Implementation Milestones important? What is their role in Improvement Planning?

Since Implementation Milestones 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 milestones 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 as necessary. Rather than having to wait for student outcome data to confirm that progress is not being made, *using missed milestones 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.*

Figure 1: Structure of the UIP

How do Implementation Milestones fit into the UIP?

In the Unified Improvement Plan (UIP), Implementation Milestones belong to the "Action Plan & Progress Monitoring" phase of the UIP (see *Figure 1*). They 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 Student Performance Priorities, and the identification of systemic Root Causes and the Major Improvement Strategies that will address them. Implementation Milestones, when used together with Interim Targets of expected student outcomes, also 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 Milestones tell us? What do they NOT tell us?

Monitoring well-formulated Implementation Milestones 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 Milestones can give a strong indication of how well implementation is progressing, it is crucial that these milestones are well-planned and well-designed to give the most accurate information about the progress of implementation. While Implementation Milestones can't necessarily tell us whether our strategy is having the intended effect on student outcomes, they *can* sometimes serve as leading measures; if milestones are missed, it is increasingly likely that student outcomes *will not* be affected as planned, since missed milestones will indicate that the strategy itself is not being implemented with fidelity.

How are Implementation Milestones different from Interim Targets? From Action Steps?

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

Interim Targets	*Implementation Milestones*	*Action Steps*
Interim Targets look at… Student Outcomes	*Implementation Milestones look at…* **Adult Actions and/or Systems**	*Action Steps look at…* Specific steps or tasks that need to happen in order to reach milestones.
Interim Targets… Measure how student performance outcomes are changing (and can measure how successful the strategy being implemented is)	*Implementation Milestones…* **Measure whether strategy is being implemented as planned**	*Action Steps…* May simply list actions (i.e., provide a checklist of tasks, but not a metric or measurement.)
Example Interim Target: By December 15, student performance on iReady will show that 35% of students who initially	*Example Implementation Milestone:* **By September 15, an audit of daily lesson plans will show that 70% of**	*Example Action Step:* A progress monitoring tracking system will be rolled out to all teachers on August 25th.

Interim Targets	Implementation Milestones	Action Steps
tested below grade level will have reached proficiency.	**teachers will incorporate language objectives into daily lesson plans.**	

Creating Strong Implementation Milestones

In order to provide strong and meaningful touchpoints that can be reliably used to gauge the roll-out of a strategy, Implementation Milestones must be carefully crafted. A strong Implementation Milestone identifies 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 milestone to gauge progress, or to follow up on missed milestones. E.g., if a milestone that lacks a target measurement, it will be difficult to determine whether that milestone has been met or missed. If a milestone lacks an actor, it will be difficult to determine who needs additional support in their role in implementing a strategy.

Prerequisites	Criteria for Success
The following elements must be in place before strong Implementation Milestones 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.	Implementation Milestones 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 milestone that meets the Criteria for Success.

Sample Implementation Milestone "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 *incorporating language objectives in their lesson plans.*

See the Appendix of this document for a list of examples and non-examples of Implementation Milestones.

Using Implementation Milestones

Setting a series of Implementation Milestones

In order to measure whether or not the implementation of a strategy is progressing appropriately, Implementation Milestones must be carefully planned and sequenced. Milestones should build on each other progressively throughout the plan period. A well-crafted series of milestones 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 Milestones can be used to track the roll-out of a Major Improvement Strategy.

Example: Series of Implementation Milestones: *Aligned to Major Improvement Strategy: Focused teacher development in embedded ELD.*

Target Date	*Measurable Implementation Milestone*
By September 1	• 50% of teachers will be **incorporating language objectives** into their daily lesson plans
By September 15	• 70% of teachers will be **incorporating language objectives** into their daily lesson plans
By October 30	• 95+% of teachers will be **incorporating language objectives** into their daily lesson plans. *Monitor monthly for the rest of the school year.* • 40% of teachers will be **assessing daily language objectives** in their exit tickets.
By December 15	• 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 15	• 90+% of teachers will be **assessing daily language objectives** in their exit tickets. *Monitor monthly for the rest of the year.* • 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	• 90+% of teachers will be **analyzing student performance** on language objectives in exit tickets during their weekly coaching meetings and **adjusting upcoming instruction**. *Monitor monthly for the rest of the year.*
April 30-EOY	*Continue monitoring milestones through end of year.*

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

- **What are the different elements or strands of your strategy?** *Consider writing a series of milestones 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 milestones.*

- **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 approximation that goes into setting milestones, 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 milestones at the outset provides the strongest foundation for effective progress monitoring throughout the year.

Progress monitoring using Implementation Milestones

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

1. **A timeline for Milestone monitoring.** Make a concrete plan for how and when actual school data will be measured against these milestones.

2. **A progress monitoring system.** Establish a system for tracking progress on those milestones.

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 milestones will enable schools to make informed and timely decisions about needed interventions or course corrections during the school year.

Effective Implementation Milestones 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 Milestones 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 milestones 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 milestone, it may be wise to invest time in more formal professional development to build teacher capacity system-wide.

- **Use Implementation Milestones and Interim Targets together to determine when course corrections are necessary.** If Implementation Milestones are all being met but Interim Targets 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 Milestones have been met.** Maintain the use of any progress monitoring trackers even after milestones 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 milestones, or whether it has dropped off. A drop off in performance may indicate a need to recommit to or re-train in the milestone task.

Appendix

Examples and Non-Examples of Implementation Milestones

Example	Why this is a strong Implementation Milestone
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.	*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.*
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.	*Although this milestone is not student-facing, it does describe a measurable set of adult actions; meeting this milestone will be a strong indication that a strategy that will impact student performance is being well-implemented.*
Beginning August 15, all students have a 1:1 meeting with their advisor every week, as reported in an internal Advisory Tracker.	*While this statement could be seen as measuring student experience, it is in fact an Implementation Milestone rather than an Interim Measure, since the student experience it measures is not a student performance outcome.*

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.	*This is an action step, rather than an Implementation Milestone. 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.*	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.	*Because this measures student outcomes, rather than adult actions, this is an Interim Measure, rather than an Implementation Milestone.*	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.	*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.*	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