Unified Improvement Planning: Guidance for New Schools (Years 1-2)

Introduction

All Colorado schools, including new schools, are required to create a Unified Improvement Plan (UIP) on an annual or biannual basis. The intent of this guidance is to help leaders, staff, and communities from new schools "plan forward" for their improvement efforts – even with limited data. This guidance document can be used in partnership with the UIP Handbook, which is available at http://www.cde.state.co.us/uip/uip_general_resources
New schools are included in this requirement due to legislation and best practice.
First, the state accountability law requires that *all* schools, regardless of circumstance, develop an improvement plan. Second, new schools can launch with a strong start when leaders, staff, and the community are proactive and purposeful in their efforts to be highly effective.

Start-Up Plans as a Starting Place

While it is not recommended that new schools use their start-up plans as their UIP, as they typically do not meet all the requirements of the UIP, start-up plans can be a highly valuable process for a new school. The start-up plan may serve as a beginning point for developing the school's UIP. This is especially true if staff use available data to plan for the learning needs of incoming students. Some of the strategies included in the school's start-up plan may also be appropriate to include as major improvement strategies or action steps in the school's UIP.

School Performance Frameworks and Biennial Flexibility

Typically, a School Performance Framework (SPF) is generated for every public school by mid to late August, based on state data from prior years. Because new schools have no state data from prior years, the state does not provide an SPF until the second year of operation. Districts are asked to assign a plan type for a new school based on their observations and accreditation plan. If the district assigns the plan type designation of Performance, schools are eligible for biennial flexibility in year 2 of operation. Flexibility is not available in year 1, as a Unified Improvement Plan must be in place for all schools. Pre-populated reports will be created for each school beginning in year 1 of operation, to communicate legislated planning expectations (e.g., READ Act). These reports will be available within the UIP online system by the end of August.

Planning Recommendations

When creating an improvement plan for a new school, it is recommended that the overall guidelines found on the improvement plan website. Keep in mind that some of the recommendations will not be applicable in a new school context. The following information provides specific adaptations to the UIP Handbook that school leaders may consider.

Gathering & Organizing Relevant Data

A school's UIP is grounded in an analysis of its student performance results. Given that new schools will not have historical data for their school by the time UIPs are due in October, new schools should do their best at the beginning of the year to gather local student achievement, language proficiency, and other student performance and background information to guide their planning.

State Performance Data (if Available)

In many cases, students in the school will have come from other Colorado public schools. As a result, CMAS performance and growth data, and possibly language proficiency data, may be available for those students from their prior schools. For inter-district transfers, check with your district as there may have been a data transfer. When analyzing prior year's data for students, the school needs to ensure that data are gathered for a large enough number of students to be representative of the school and show a picture of overall needs.

Local Student Learning and Process Data

Local data is a second potential source that can be collected early in the school year. This includes screening or pre-assessment data, as well as other student performance information. Local student performance data (e.g., initial benchmark data, student work samples, language proficiency data) should be used in data analysis and target-setting. Local demographic, school process and perception data (e.g., student and staff characteristics, observation data, materials, perception surveys) should be used during root cause analysis and as part of identifying implementation benchmarks.
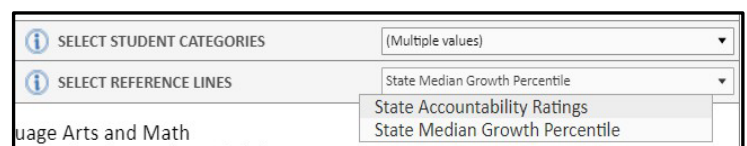
UIP Sections

Description

The new school should include information about when, why and how the school was created, as well as any other information that will help set the context for the school (e.g., STEM focus, Montessori approach).

Student Performance Priorities

While existing schools use data produced in prior years to identify their student performance priorities, new schools can use current data to identify areas of focus (e.g., if the school has a high population of English language learners, the school may choose to focus on ensuring high quality language development in all courses). Beginning of the year (BOY) assessment results, demographic data, or other student data may be used to identify areas of focus. The school may choose to focus on one or two areas, such as Best First Instruction or School Culture, based off focus areas determined in a start-up plan, or within new school best practices.

School Target Setting

New schools should utilize statewide medians, framework cut scores (available in the CDE Dashboard) and targets made available by vendors of local assessments. If the school is setting behavioral, engagement, perception, or process targets, consider setting targets that represent continuous progress toward establishing the school in alignment with its mission and vision.

Root Causes

For new schools, root cause analysis can be thought of as a process of identifying potential barriers to student learning. Through root cause analysis, the school staff should proactively identify aspects of the school educational offerings that, if not established well, could cause low student achievement results.

The very nature of being a new school implies a need to develop curricular practices, data systems, and define and maintain a positive school culture. The school team should spend time defining areas in need of staff development or improvement. This will ensure the identified major improvement strategies respond to the school's context and highest areas of need in the school.

Major Improvement Strategies

Based on the analysis of available data and discussions with stakeholders, strategies should be developed that school leadership and staff will put in place to address the identified root cause(s). It may be valuable for the team to reference CDE Strategy Guides to provide structure for the strategy development process.