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

COLORADO
Department of Education

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 Unified Improvement Plan Guidebook, which is available at http://www.cde.state.co.us/uip.

New schools are included in this requirement due to legislation and best practice.
- First, the state accountability law (SB 09-163) requires that *all* schools, regardless of circumstance, develop a UIP.
- 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.

Note: For the purposes of this guidance, "new schools" refers to schools that are in their first year of operation or have combined with another school and have little or no trend data. Normally, new schools are issued a new, unique school code from CDE.

Foundational Questions

Can new schools use their start-up plans as their UIP for the first year of operation?
No. While start-up plans can be a highly valuable process for a new school, it does not typically meet all of the requirements of the UIP. The start-up plan may serve as a beginning point for developing the school's UIP. This is especially true if staff used 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.

Do new schools receive School Performance Frameworks (SPFs)? If not, how do they know where to focus their improvement plans?
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. New schools are advised to prioritize collecting and analyzing local level data (e.g., screening data, benchmarking or interim data) given that they do not have the advantage of an initial SPF. With a robust local assessment system, new schools can quickly build descriptive information on student performance and the health of the overall system that can guide improvement efforts.

Do new schools receive a pre-populated report for the UIP?
Yes, new schools that have received a school code by July will receive a pre-populated report in late August/early September just like other schools. However, little or no pre-populated data will be available on the reports. New schools should still use this template in developing their first UIP. The context of the new school can be described in the data narrative.

How should new schools approach the data narrative and the action plan of the UIP? Are there any special considerations?

In creating an improvement plan for a new school, it is recommended that the overall guidelines found within the UIP Handbook be consulted. The handbook is available on the UIP website: http://www.cde.state.co.us/uip

Keep in mind that some of the guidelines in the handbook will not apply as well in a new school context. The following information provides specific adaptations to the UIP Handbook that school leaders may consider.

Gathering and Organizing Relevant Data (UIP Handbook – Preparing to Plan)

The 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, new schools should make every effort possible 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. The following table lists data sources that may be collected at the school level for this purpose. Local student performance data (first column) should be used in data analysis (e.g., trend statements, priority performance challenges) and target-setting. Local demographic, school process and perception data (second through fourth columns) should be used during root cause analysis and as part of identifying implementation benchmarks.

Used for Data Analysis and Target Setting	Used for Root Cause Analysis and Implementation Benchmarks Data Collected at Beginning of School Year		
Student Learning	Demographic Data	Process Data	Perception Data
• Initial local benchmark or interim assessment results • Student work samples • Beginning of the year classroom assessment results • Language proficiency data	• School locale and size of student population • Student characteristics, including poverty, language proficiency, IEP, migrant, race/ethnicity • Staff characteristics (e.g., experience)	• Curriculum documents • Instructional materials • Observations of instructional practice • Academic interventions available to students • Student attendance • Discipline referrals and suspension rates • Schedules and class sizes • Family and community involvement policies or practices • Professional development • Services and/or programs (Title I, Special Education, ESL)	• Teaching and learning conditions surveys • Perception survey data (e.g., parents, students, teachers, community, school leaders) • Self-assessment results

Section III: Progress Monitoring of Prior Year's Performance Targets

Since the school is new, no targets will have been set in the previous year's UIP. School leaders should indicate that this section of the UIP template is "Not Applicable" because the school is new and established no performance targets for the prior year.

Section III: Data Narrative

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

Section III: Data Analysis and Root Cause Analysis

Notable Trends. Since yearly trend data will not be available for schools in their first two years of operation, the school should use locally collected data to complete this section. The school should examine the following areas to begin their identification of notable trends

- Student performance in various content areas and differences in that data
- Specific standards within content areas that are particularly challenging
- Disaggregated groups that might need particular attention (Free/reduced Lunch, English Language Learners (ELLs), etc.)
- Language proficiency
- Impact of attendance and behavior on learning

Priority Performance Challenges. While existing schools use data produced in prior years to identify their priority performance challenges, new schools can use current data to identify areas of focus. Beginning of the year assessment results, demographic data, or other student data may be used to identify areas of focus.

> For example, if the demographics show a high number of ELLs, the school may choose to focus on ensuring high quality language development in all courses.

Root Causes. According to the UIP Handbook, root causes

> *"describe the deepest underlying cause, or causes, of performance challenges. They are the causes that, if dissolved, would result in elimination, or substantial reduction, of the performance challenge(s). Root causes describe why the performance challenges exist. They are the things that most need to change and can change. Root causes are not student attributes (such as poverty level or student motivation), but rather relate to adult behavior. Furthermore, the root cause should be something within the school or district's control."*

Root cause analysis is typically a process for identifying past practices that have contributed to a particular student performance result(s). 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 addressed, could cause low student achievement results.

> For example, if the school's current data (data analysis) reveals a priority performance challenge related to the math and reading performance of ELLs, the school might identify as a potential barrier (root cause) the lack of a system for early identification and monitoring of language proficiency development of ELL students.

Section IV: Action Plans

School/District Target Setting. If the school has been successful in gathering state data associated with the priority performance challenge(s), the school can follow the guidance provided in the UIP Handbook for setting performance targets for the next two school years.

Action Planning Form: Identify Major Improvement Strategies. Major improvement strategies are high level descriptions of the actions that the school leadership and staff will put in place to address the identified barriers/root cause(s). In some cases, the leadership and staff of a new school may have already identified strategies and actions in the start-up plan that are designed to address the priority performance challenges and potential barriers (root causes) for the UIP. If so, these specific strategies and actions can be transferred into their UIP action plan. If not, the school will need to follow the guidance provided in the UIP Handbook regarding developing major improvement strategies, action steps and implementation benchmarks (progress monitoring).