

Introduction

Note: For the purposes of this guidance, “new schools” refers to schools that have just opened or combined with another school and have little or no trend data. Normally, new schools are issued a new, unique school code from CDE.

Leaders and staff in new schools are sometimes confused by the state requirement to create a Unified Improvement Plan (UIP). *Why would a school that has not been in existence need an improvement plan?* 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. 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.

Foundational Questions

Can new schools just use their start-up plans as their UIP for the first few years 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. However, 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 these schools an SPF in the first year of operation. An SPF will be generated in the second year. However, major components (e.g., growth, growth gaps, graduation rates) for the new schools will not be available until year three. While new schools are at a disadvantage in those first couple of years of operation without clues from the SPF on where to focus improvement efforts, new schools are advised to prioritize collecting and analyzing local level data (e.g., screening data, benchmarking or interim data). 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. Bear in mind that little or no pre-populated data is 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 beginning of the data narrative.

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How should new schools approach the data narrative and the action plan of the UIP? What are some 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. 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.

Adaptation to Gathering and Organizing Relevant Data (UIP Handbook, p. 5)

The school's UIP is grounded in an analysis of its student performance results. The first challenge staff in a new school will face is what to use with the absence of historical student performance results. At the beginning of the school year, new schools should make every effort possible to gather local student achievement and language proficiency data to guide their planning.

Required Data if Available. In many cases, students in the school will have come from other Colorado public schools. As a result, CSAP/TCAP performance and growth data, and possibly language proficiency data, may be available for those students from their prior schools. This may be easier to track down for students transferring within the new school's district. For inter-district transfers, check with your district as there may have been a data transfer. While obtaining data for students is highly recommended, the school needs to ensure data are gathered for a large enough number of students to be representative of the school. Otherwise, a small amount of data will not necessarily show the true picture of the overall needs of the students in the school.

Recommended Student Learning and Process Data. If the school collects screening or pre-assessment data, then local data is available at the beginning of the school year and can be referenced in the UIP (assuming the n-count is large enough). The following table lists suggested 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
<ul style="list-style-type: none"> Initial local benchmark or interim assessment results Student work samples Beginning of the year classroom assessment results Language proficiency data 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> School locale and size of student population Student characteristics, including poverty, language proficiency, IEP, migrant, race/ethnicity Staff characteristics (e.g., experience) 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> Curriculum documents Instructional materials Observations of Instructional practice Academic interventions available to students Student attendance during the first few months of the year Discipline referrals and suspension rates from the first few months of the year Schedules and class sizes Family/community involvement policies/practices Professional development (structure, participation, focus) Services and/or programs (Title I, special ed, ESL) 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> Teaching and learning conditions surveys Perception survey data (e.g., parents, students, teachers, community, school leaders) Self-assessment tools based on best practices

Adaptation to Worksheet #1: 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.

Adaptation to Worksheet #2: Data Analysis

Notable Trends (UIP Handbook, p. 14). Since the school is new, trend data will most likely not be available – at least for schools in their first year of operation. However, the school may have collected data at the beginning-of-the-year from one or more of the state and/or local sources listed in the section above. Following are some questions that might be asked about the school’s data to outline students’ current needs. This is not an exhaustive list, but is intended to jump-start the local data analysis process.

Questions to Consider	Potential Data Source(s)
Given the current students in our school, how are our students performing/have they performed in the various content areas? Is there a content in which they are performing higher or lower than another?	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> Students’ prior year TCAP results Beginning-of-the year interim assessment results
Are there particular standards within specific content areas on which our current students might show greater needs than on others?	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> Beginning-of-the-year /interim assessment results disaggregated by content standard Classroom-administered pre-assessment results Student work samples
Are there particular disaggregated groups (e.g., Free/Reduced Lunch, minority students, students with disabilities, English Language Learners) of students to which we might need to pay particular attention?	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> Prior year’s TCAP results disaggregated student groups. Beginning-of-the-year interim assessment results disaggregated by student group Classroom administered pre-assessment results disaggregated by student groups
To what degree might language proficiency be a barrier for our students and their learning?	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> Beginning-of-the-year language proficiency assessment
To what degree might attendance or discipline be issues for our school?	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> Attendance and behavior data from the first few months of school

Priority Performance Challenges (UIP Handbook, p. 17). While existing schools use data produced by their systems in prior years to identify their priority performance challenges, new schools can use current data to identify potential student performance challenges for areas of focus. For example, the beginning-of-year interim assessment results may point to the need to increase a focus on literacy. Lacking student achievement data, the school may examine their demographics and choose an area of focus based on what schools with similar demographics generally encounter as challenges. For example, if the demographics show a high number of English Language Learners (ELLs), the school may choose to focus on ensuring high quality language development through literacy. The key to completing this step of the planning process is to use the school’s current data to determine a specific student performance focus or foci.

Root Causes (UIP Handbook, p. 20). According to the UIP Handbook,

Root causes are statements that 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 may be challenging for new schools because root cause is typically about 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.

Adaptation to Data Narrative (UIP Handbook, p. 21)

In addition to the other elements required in the data narrative, the new school should include relevant 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).

Adaptation to Section IV: Action Plans (UIP Handbook, p. 22)

School/District Target Setting Form (UIP Handbook, p. 22). 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. If not, the school will need to set performance targets that are ambitious but attainable and/or follow guidelines provided by their district or chartering institution.

Action Planning Form: Identify Major Improvement Strategies (UIP Handbook, p. 24). 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 and action steps.