

# School Leadership Playbook for Curriculum Implementation

## Overview

Research and experience show that successful curriculum implementation is a multiyear process. Leaders play a critical role in creating the conditions for teachers and students to thrive. This playbook outlines the essential actions and progression indicators that guide leaders through the journey of implementation, from initial adoption through skillfully adapted practice.

Educators progress through three phases—**Learn, Deepen, and Know**—as they develop the skills, knowledge, and mindsets needed for effective implementation. These phases are not strictly linear, and educators may move through them at different rates. This playbook is not an evaluative tool; it is a vision for what strong implementation can look like and a guide for reflection, goal-setting, and continuous improvement.





# The Five Essential Leadership Actions

Regardless of curriculum or content area, leaders must take five essential actions to support successful implementation:

**1**

## **Establish a Vision:**

Define what excellent teaching and learning looks like with the new curriculum.

**2**

## **Know the Curriculum:**

Build a strong personal understanding of the curriculum's design, materials, and instructional approach.

**3**

## **Know the Teachers:**

Understand the shifts the curriculum requires and anticipate teachers' needs and challenges.

**4**

## **Support Implementation:**

Ensure teachers have the time, materials, and professional learning needed to succeed.

**5**

## **Monitor and Reflect:**

Gather data, celebrate successes, and continuously adapt support.



## Implementation Phases

In the **Learn** phase, teachers and leaders are building initial familiarity with the curriculum's organization and design. Leaders focus on establishing the conditions for success: forming an implementation team, setting a shared vision, and putting structures in place that support teachers. Teachers begin developing the habits and routines that support consistent implementation, and students build familiarity with the curriculum and participate fully in lessons.

In the **Deepen** phase, teachers and leaders move beyond initial familiarity into deeper understanding of the curriculum and its embedded supports. Leaders strengthen the structures established in Year 1 and begin using data more deliberately to inform professional learning and coaching. Teachers develop habits that more intentionally enhance student learning—customizing instruction based on evidence and leading collaborative work with colleagues. Students engage more actively, making connections across concepts and demonstrating growing persistence.

In the **Know** phase, teachers and leaders know the curriculum deeply and use that knowledge to make strategic decisions. Leaders refine enabling conditions with a focus on sustainability and teacher autonomy. Teachers make evidence-based adaptations in real time, responding to individual student needs with confidence. Students demonstrate ownership of their learning—initiating discourse, drawing on prior knowledge independently, and approaching problems with creativity and persistence.

## Implementation Progression Indicators

The following tables describe what strong implementation looks like for leaders, teachers, and students at each phase. Use these indicators to identify current strengths, clarify areas of need, and set goals for growth.

LEADERS			
	LEARN	DEEPEN	KNOW
<b>Vision &amp; Goals</b>	Craft and share a vision and measurable goals for implementation.	Analyze implementation data against vision and goals; adjust supports based on trends.	Interpret data to adjust real-time supports for individual populations.
<b>Team &amp; Structures</b>	Form an implementation team with defined roles; establish site-based structures for scheduling, materials access, and instructional preparation.	Strengthen site-based structures; audit system components for curriculum alignment.	Strategically refine structures; tighten alignment of all system components.
<b>Professional Learning</b>	Participate in foundational professional learning; create a plan for ongoing learning for leaders and teachers.	Customize professional learning plans for new and returning leaders; demonstrate knowledge of progressions across grade levels.	Customize plans to meet individual leader needs; provide opportunities for peer observation and teacher-led growth planning.
<b>Observations &amp; Coaching</b>	Use non-evaluative observations to assess implementation health and determine professional learning needs.	Use observations to identify changes in teacher practice; cultivate teacher leadership in collaborative planning.	Establish teacher autonomy in data-informed decision-making.
<b>Culture</b>	Model the belief that all students can access grade-level content; acknowledge and celebrate effort and successes.	Lead teachers in analyzing student work; celebrate successes across the school or district.	Maintain academic growth for all students across classrooms and schools.

## Implementation Progression Indicators (cont.)

TEACHERS			
	LEARN	DEEPEN	KNOW
<b>Curriculum Knowledge</b>	Participate in foundational professional learning; learn how the curriculum aligns to relevant standards.	Advocate for ongoing professional learning; learn to use knowledge of content and students to customize instruction.	Reflect on practice and student evidence to set personal professional learning priorities.
<b>Curriculum Study</b>	Engage in collaborative curriculum study; understand and use emphasized concepts, terminology, models, and strategies.	Begin to lead or co-lead collaborative curriculum study.	Consistently lead collaborative curriculum study and student work analysis.
<b>Implementation</b>	Implement the curriculum as intended; maintain pacing and use all lesson components.	Use student work and embedded assessments as evidence to customize instruction; leverage embedded lesson supports.	Make in-the-moment and strategic, evidence-based adaptations that respond to individual student needs.
<b>Classroom Environment</b>	Establish norms that promote rigorous, grade-level learning and productive struggle.	Routinely monitor student thinking; prompt students to explain their thinking and build on others' ideas.	Encourage students to initiate and lead discourse; use strategies flexibly and creatively.

STUDENTS			
	LEARN	DEEPEN	KNOW
Knowledge & Skills	Build familiarity with the curriculum; learn emphasized concepts, terminology, models, and strategies.	Use strategies and models flexibly to solve problems and build understanding.	Strategically use models and strategies; independently draw on prior knowledge to support new learning.
Engagement	Participate fully with all lesson components.	Make connections between previously learned and current concepts; demonstrate persistence.	Demonstrate ownership of learning: ask questions, offer critiques, and reflect on peers' work.
Discourse	Engage in disciplinary thinking and problem-solving.	Use precise terminology; explain thinking and connect ideas in discussion.	Consistently use precise terminology; approach problems with creativity, and express joy in learning

# Guide to Getting Started

## Before the School Year Begins

*90+ Days Before (Spring)*

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### **Build Your Team**

- Select members of the implementation team, including voices from multiple levels of the learning community (e.g., district administrators, principals, instructional coaches, content leads, special education teachers).
- Define each team member's role and establish a regular meeting cadence.
- Use the Learn Phase Progression Indicators to align expectations for Year 1.

### **Establish a Vision**

- Write a clear, student-focused vision statement for implementation.
- Develop vision-aligned, measurable goals and a plan for monitoring progress.
- Share the vision and goals with the entire learning community.
- Anticipate questions and concerns from teachers, families, and other stakeholders; plan for how you will address them.

### **Gather and Distribute Materials**

- Order and organize curriculum materials, ensuring appropriate access for leaders, teachers, and students (print and digital).
- Develop a plan for distributing materials and managing storage.

## 60 Days Before (Early Summer)

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### Leader Professional Learning

- Participate in foundational professional development for leaders.
- Build sufficient familiarity with the curriculum to navigate materials, describe the instructional approach, and answer basic stakeholder questions.

### Teacher Professional Learning

- Schedule foundational professional development for teachers to occur before school begins.
- Ensure teachers have access to on-demand learning resources and encourage completion before the first day of school.

## 30 Days Before (Late Summer)

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### Structures and Expectations

- Distribute materials and digital licenses to all stakeholders.
- Allocate adequate instructional time by adhering to the recommended time allocations of your specific curriculum, and schedule weekly grade-level collaborative planning (45–60 minutes).
- Set and share clear instructional expectations with both leaders and teachers.

### Plan for Monitoring

- Establish a system for data collection: non-evaluative observations, teacher feedback conversations, surveys, and student work.
- Establish a process for analyzing data: identifying trends, determining root causes, and creating action plans.

## During the School Year

### Fall Semester

- Ensure teachers can describe the vision and know their role in achieving implementation goals.
- Hold regular implementation team meetings to monitor progress, address challenges, and sustain efforts.
- Ensure ongoing professional learning for leaders and teachers, including guided observations, collaborative planning, and instruction aligned to identified priorities.
- Collect and analyze implementation data regularly; adjust action plans as needed.
- Acknowledge and celebrate teacher and student successes with the learning community.

### Spring Semester

- Continue regular implementation team meetings; reflect on vision progress and adjust supports.
- Continue professional learning aligned to instructional priorities.
- Ensure teachers engage in ongoing weekly collaborative planning using curriculum-aligned protocols.
- Collect and analyze data; update action plans.
- Celebrate successes and begin planning for Year 2.

## Reflect and Plan for Year 2

The actions taken before and during Year 1 are not one-time tasks. Each year, leaders revisit these same actions with increasing focus and sophistication. Reflecting on Year 1 is essential for thoughtful Year 2 planning. Analyze evidence from the year to identify patterns. What are the strengths to build on? What needs deeper support? Use these reflections to inform adjustments to professional learning, resource allocation, and instructional priorities. By grounding Year 2 planning in concrete insights from Year 1, leaders ensure that implementation becomes increasingly targeted, coherent, and responsive to the needs of all learners.

## Key Questions for Leadership Teams

### Establishing a Vision

- Why did we adopt this curriculum? What changes do we hope to see?
- What do we want teaching and learning to look and feel like in our classrooms?
- How will we communicate the vision to all stakeholders?

A strong vision statement is student-focused, content-specific, aligned to standards, and inspiring. Here is one example:

*In our classrooms, learning comes to life as students collaboratively pursue knowledge through rigorous, grade-level content. Students learn from rich texts, materials, and academic discussions with peers. As they engage with challenging topics and tasks, they build the knowledge and skills to think critically, communicate clearly, and demonstrate ownership of their learning.*

## Knowing the Curriculum

- Can we navigate the print and digital materials fluently?
- Can we describe the curriculum's instructional approach to teachers, families, and community members?
- How will we deepen our own understanding over the course of the year?

## Knowing the Teachers

- Which instructional shifts does this curriculum require? Which may pose the greatest challenge?
- What are our teachers' strengths, mindsets, and areas for growth?
- What are non-negotiables for implementation? Where do teachers have autonomy and choice?

## Supporting Implementation

- What structures, time, materials, and professional learning, are in place to support teachers?
- When will teachers collaborate? With grade-level teams? With specialist teachers?
- How will we engage families and caregivers as partners in learning?

## Monitoring and Reflecting

- How will we know if implementation is on track?
- Who will analyze data, how often, and with what process?
- How will we celebrate successes and address areas for growth?

*This playbook was developed to support school and district leaders in building the conditions for successful, sustained curriculum implementation. It is designed to be adapted to the specific curriculum, context, and needs of your learning community.*

