Academic Acceleration

EdResearch for Action's **Act on Evidence Toolkit** helps education leaders evaluate and strengthen their current programs by aligning them with the most relevant evidence-based practices. This toolkit serves as a guide to help identify areas of improvement and create actionable steps to improve programs.

This **Academic Acceleration** tool is one of four focus areas and is designed to be used collaboratively by teams, promoting a culture of continuous improvement and reflective practice.

ACADEMIC ACCELERATION

STUDENT MENTAL HEALTH & WELL-BEING

FAMILY & COMMUNITY PARTNERSHIPS

COHERENCE ACROSS INITIATIVES

EdResearch for Action
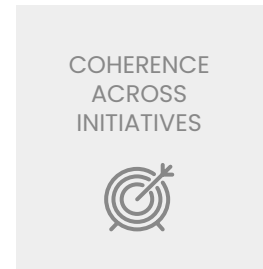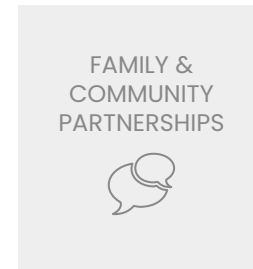
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STEP 1: Reflect and rate alignment to evidence

Use the rubric below to capture reflection ratings and rationales based on the team's assessment of your current alignment to evidence:

Strategy	Rating	Rationale
1. Tier 1 instruction		
2. High-quality instructional materials and curriculum-based professional learning		
3. Instructional coaching		
4. Student engagement and attendance		
5. Intensive academic interventions		
6. High-impact tutoring program (if applicable)		
7. High-quality summer learning programs (if applicable)		

1. Does the district support schools to implement effective Tier 1 instruction?

To arrive at a rating for this area, consider evidence from these sources:
- Classroom observations
- Student performance data
- District programming documents and guidance related to Tier 1 supports
- Professional development plans and participation data
- Family engagement plans

(4) Strong alignment looks like…	(1) Weak alignment looks like…	Rating (4-1)
- The district provides scheduling guidance to minimize disruptions to instructional time, such as announcements and fire drills. - The district supports schools in tracking and re-engaging students by using high-quality formative assessments to identify those needing extra support and provide just-in-time, interventions.	- Students disproportionately receive Tier 2-3 supports, suggesting Tier 1 instruction doesn't meet most needs. Additional supports prioritize remediation over acceleration, limiting use of grade-level content. - The district fails to proactively identify students' support needs or relies on large-scale, standardized testing for this purpose.	
The district ensures teachers have sufficient time to communicate and plan across grade-level teams[1].	Teachers rarely have time to meet together for common planning.	
The district implements targeted family engagement strategies[2], including take-home books, text messages, and activities linked to the in-school curriculum.	There are limited opportunities for families to engage in supporting their students' learning, or only certain families are targeted.	

2. Does the district ensure access to high-quality instructional materials and curriculum-based professional learning?

To arrive at a rating for this area, consider evidence from these sources:
- District curriculum and material adoption policies
- Professional development plans and participation data
- Teacher surveys
- Classroom observations
- Interviews with curriculum coordinators

(4) Strong alignment looks like...	(1) Weak alignment looks like...	Rating (4-1)
• The district has adopted and ensures consistent implementation of high-quality (e.g., rated green by EdReports), culturally relevant materials showcasing a diverse population and multiple perspectives. Materials are designed to meet the needs of all students including students with disabilities and English Learners[3]. • The district provides educators with access to a menu of resources, prioritizing a focus on strong practices and educator agency and ownership over fidelity of materials, while still ensuring strong guardrails to maintain rigor.	• High-quality materials have not been adopted, do not meet the needs of all learners, or the district cannot ensure buildings consistently use them. • The curriculum is adopted with over reliance on the fidelity of materials over the implementation of practices or without clear flexibility guardrails resulting in variable implementation and quality	
• The district provides extensive, ongoing, differentiated professional learning related to HQIM content, pedagogy, and assessment of student learning. Content is often applicable for educators to use the very next day.	• There is no intentional or ongoing professional learning to support teachers to effectively use the materials; if PD exists, it is one-off, ineffective, or surface-level..	

• The district supports schools to establish high-quality professional learning communities (PLCs) or concentrated summer workshops for educators to collaborate on HQIM implementation, lessons and review work. • There is ongoing onboarding for new teachers to ensure training and implementation support.	• PLCs focused on HQIM implementation are not in place or are used as "check-in" meetings. • Turnover and lack of onboarding supports result in new teachers without HQIM training.	
• The district proactively supports use of materials; teachers are involved in implementation decisions (e.g., timing) and adapt based on students' interests. • District walkthroughs show evidence materials are used as intended and adapted with fidelity.	• Ineffective messaging results in teachers resisting materials they see as "de-professionalizing" them. • The materials are not used consistently or are modified beyond the intent.	

3. Does the district provide focused, meaningful instructional coaching to improve educators' practice?

To arrive at a rating for this area, consider evidence from these sources:
- District professional development plans
- Educator feedback on quality and utility of professional development and coaching
- Coach surveys/feedback
- Teacher retention data
- Teacher evaluation data (growth in specific competencies)
- Coach job descriptions, schedules, and rosters

(4) Strong alignment looks like…	(1) Weak alignment looks like…	Rating (4-1)
• The district ensures schools provide staff with numerous opportunities to receive sustained, job-embedded professional learning focused on relevant discrete skills and active learning, and opportunities for collaboration within and across schools.	• Professional learning opportunities are low quality, disconnected from staff's greatest needs, and/or un-engaging.. There are limited if any formal collaboration opportunities.	
• The district ensures that teachers receive individualized, time-intensive coaching[4] (i.e., at least 1x every two weeks) sustained over the course of the semester or year that is context-specific, and focused on discrete skills. • Generally, teachers are motivated to participate and invested in coaching as a way to learn new ideas and improve student learning.	• Teachers do not receive focused coaching and/or get a few scattered sessions focused on general teaching practices. • Teachers are often reluctantly forced into receiving coaching, resulting in resistance and resentment.	

- The district ensures coaches have strong school and district support, they can effectively build relationships with teachers (e.g., limited coach-teacher ratios and strategic assignments based on experience and expertise), and their time is protected for coaching activities. - The district hires coaches with strong instructional practices who can build effective relationships and credibility with teachers. - The district provides coaches with regular opportunities to connect and learn from peers, as well as onboarding and ongoing professional learning (e.g., approaches to instruction).	- Coaches do not receive leadership support and must frequently focus on non-coaching activities (e.g., subbing, test administration). Many have large caseloads or the sole strategy for high-quality instruction. - Coaches lack instructional expertise and are often assigned as coach and evaluator to teachers they support (diminishing impact). - There are limited opportunities for coaches to grow in their practice or collaborate with one another.	

4. Does the district effectively employ strategies to increase student engagement and attendance?

To arrive at a rating for this area, consider evidence from these sources:
- Attendance data (disaggregated by student subgroup)
- Classroom observation data on student engagement (disaggregated by student subgroup)
- Chronic absenteeism protocols and practices
- Student perception data on engagement (disaggregated by student subgroup)

(4) Strong alignment looks like…	(1) Weak alignment looks like…	Rating (4-1)
- The district uses strategies to proactively reduce student absenteeism[5] including providing safe and reliable transportation to/from school, timely attendance information to parents, proactive attendance pattern analysis and identification of chronically absent students, and positive messaging about school. - When students are identified as chronically absent, the district supports schools to understand and address the underlying causes for the students' unique circumstances.	- The district does not engage in strategies to reduce student absenteeism, or employs unhelpful practices like setting expectations for perfect attendance. - When students are chronically absent, little to no effort is put into understanding the underlying cause before schools move on or deploy punitive strategies (expulsion, suspension).	
- The district supports schools to ensure and measure (e.g., through perception data) that students are engaged with rigorous and engaging instruction,[6] culturally relevant pedagogy, co-curricular opportunities, and role models or mentors. - Classrooms see evidence of strong engagement with students taking ownership for and applying their learning.	The district does not know the extent to which schools are providing strong student experiences or using student engagement best practices. Observed instruction is often teacher-led with students obviously disengaged.	

5. Does the district support schools to prioritize and implement intensive academic interventions?

To arrive at a rating for this area, consider evidence from these sources:
- District strategic plans/ school-wide intervention plans
- Student progress monitoring data
- Student survey data (disaggregated by student subgroup)
- Teacher surveys

(4) Strong alignment looks like…	(1) Weak alignment looks like…	Rating (4-1)
• The district provides effective interventions such as high-impact tutoring or extended learning interventions[7] (e.g., weeklong accelerated academies staffed with highly effective teachers and double-dose math structures) for students in need. • The district is strategic about ensuring highest-need students are receiving multiple acceleration opportunities (e.g., prioritizing those who receive tutoring for summer learning programs). • The district has strong proactive monitoring systems, norms, and routines (e.g., through an MTSS) around early student warning signs to ID students before support is critical.	• There are no targeted interventions for students in need. Students receive most of their additional support during the regular school day, without time for additional acceleration. • There is not an intentional approach to ensure the highest-need students receive multiple acceleration opportunities. • Students who are falling behind are often not identified until they are failing. • There is minimal focus on social- emotional supports for students	

6. If applicable, does the district provide high-impact tutoring programs for students?

To arrive at a rating for this area, consider evidence from these sources:
- Tutoring program specifics (e.g., staffing, curriculum)
- Training and support plans for tutors
- Tutoring program data (e.g, attendance, engagement, achievement, perception from participants), disaggregated by student subgroup
- Interviews with tutoring coordinators

(4) Strong alignment looks like…	(1) Weak alignment looks like…	Rating (4-1)
- The tutoring program supports groups up to three students for a minimum of three sessions per week[8] (30-60 min/day, for >10 weeks), or as intensive week-long small-group (<10 student) programs taught by talented teachers. - Ideally, it is offered during or immediately after the school day. - Tutors use high-quality instructional materials aligned with classroom content and focus on building foundational skills connected to what students learn in class. - The district provides clear learning objectives and rigorous evaluations to assess program effectiveness, and supports tutors to use data and informal assessments to tailor instruction.	- The district's tutoring program has no minimum dosage requirements or offers infrequent (e.g., 1x/week) light touch tutoring; it is primarily offered in large groups outside the school day or during summer. - Tutoring materials are not high-quality nor aligned to classroom content, often focused on remediation using prior grade-level materials. - The district does not use data (e.g., surveys, benchmark assessments) to assess effectiveness and improve support.	
Tutoring is seen as an opportunity for positive support, ideally (if cost allows) for all students in a lower-performing grade level or school for broader organizational commitment.	Tutoring has a negative stigma as remediation or punishment, disincentivizing participation. Students must "opt-in," exacerbating inequities.	

7. If applicable, does the district provide a quality summer learning program for students?

To arrive at a rating for this area, consider evidence from these sources:
- Summer learning plans (staffing, curriculum, rosters)
- Interviews with summer learning coordinators
- Observation of summer learning sessions
- Communication of opportunities to families

(4) Strong alignment looks like...	(1) Weak alignment looks like...	Rating (4-1)
- The district provides intensive summer learning programs of at least five weeks with >3 hours per day of academic instruction[9]. - Classes are capped at 15 students to ensure individualized support and strong adult-student relationships. - Summer programs include high quality instructional materials aligned to school-year content and student needs, prioritizing engaging and "SAFE" (sequenced, active, focused, and explicit) enrichment activities. - The district frames summer learning programs as positive opportunities (as opposed to punishment) and clearly communicates the expectation and importance of attendance for those who sign up.	- Summer learning programs are short (<3 weeks) with large classes (>15 students) reducing individual attention, relationships, and meaningful differentiation. - Program design prioritizes offering students a place to be (time in classroom) over meaningful and enjoyable academic instruction and enrichment activities. - Communication about summer learning programs results in negative perceptions (e.g., as punishment) and/or assumptions attendance is optional.	

• Participating students are generally engaged and consistently attend, especially those with the greatest academic needs. • The program is staffed with certified teachers with content knowledge and grade-level experience, and specialized support personnel for students with disabilities; staff work the entire program duration. Materials are provided to staff in advance, allowing them to maximize academic learning time, teach more content, and have greater satisfaction with the program. • The district ensures adequate program management and early planning beginning at the latest in January (led by half-time summer program directors in large districts).	• Attendance and student engagement are low or inconsistent, especially for students in the greatest need of support. • Staff are not instructionally strong, consistent, and/or receive insufficient support to meet the needs of students with disabilities or English Learners. Instructors create their own lesson plans that are often not aligned with the district's high-quality materials. • Program planning is haphazard or last minute, with unclear responsibility for this work.	

STEP 2: Prioritize

Analyze: Based on the ratings and look-fors from the reflection rubric, consider which areas should be top priority to better align with evidence. In particular, consider the following:

- Which areas are least aligned to evidence currently, and might benefit the most from progress in the coming months?
- Which areas are most aligned with internal strategic goals and existing priorities?
- Which areas have the greatest need or would allow the greatest improvements in reducing inequities in performance and experiences across subgroups?
- For which areas or aspects do you already have district capacity and resources to execute (e.g., people, money, technology, stakeholder buy-in and or system momentum)?
- Which areas would you need to prioritize first - either as required to be in place for others or would enable faster progress on others down the road?

If needed, map your top ideas on a chart like the one to the right based on the level of importance and difficulty of each.

Prioritize: Based on above, select up to three priorities to focus on for at least the next 6 months:

1.
2.
3.

Review: Reflect and revise priorities as needed based on how well they will contribute to more equitable opportunities and/or outcomes for students.

STEP 3: Plan

For each priority listed above, work with your team to complete the planning roadmap:

PRIORITY NAME:	
Description *What are you focused on doing?*	
Rating and opportunity *What is the current rating of alignment to evidence (from the reflection rubric)?* *What opportunities exist for strengthening this?*	
Root cause *What is currently standing in your way?* *Why haven't you achieved this to date?*	
What it would take *What would the district need to commit to, secure, or build to be successful in this work?*	

PRIORITY NAME:	
Reduce inequities *How will this priority contribute to more equitable opportunities and/or outcomes for students? What specific equity considerations will be taken into account to ensure this work results in more equitable outcomes?*	
Stakeholders to engage *Who needs to be informed, engaged, and supported to make this successful?*	
Defining success *What could you realistically and meaningfully accomplish in 6 months? 1 year? 3 years?*	

Action plan *What specific action steps will you take to get there?* **Add more rows if/as needed*	ACTION	TIMELINE	OWNER

STEP 4: Progress Monitor

Effective progress monitoring is crucial to ensuring that the strategies being implemented remain aligned with evidence-based practices and lead to meaningful outcomes. To achieve this, teams should establish a regular review process—preferably each quarter—that allows them to reflect on the progress made, reassess alignment with their initial goals, and adjust plans as needed.

Key Components of Progress Monitoring:

- Regular Reflection on Progress:
  - Each quarter, teams should revisit the reflection rubric and evaluate the current alignment of their initiatives with the evidence-based practices outlined in previous steps.
  - Collecting new data, both quantitative (e.g., student performance data, attendance records) and qualitative (e.g., teacher feedback, classroom observations), is essential to inform these reflections.
- Adjusting Priorities:
  - Based on the reflection, teams may need to update their priorities from Step 2. The goal is to ensure that the most critical and impactful actions remain the focal point of district efforts.
- Continuous Improvement:
  - By consistently revisiting the reflection rubric and revising action plans, districts can ensure that their efforts remain responsive to the evolving needs of students and educators. Flexibility and adaptability should be built into the process, with clear mechanisms for identifying challenges and celebrating successes.

Resources

1. EdResearch for Action brief [Increasing Teacher Preparedness Through Effective Student Teaching](#)
2. EdResearch for Action brief [Engaging Parents and Families To Support The Recovery of Districts and Schools](#)
3. If not rated by EdReports, districts can review their own curriculum using one of the following [EdReports tools](#).
4. EdResearch for Action brief [Design Principles for Improving Practice with Instructional Coaching](#)
5. EdResearch for Action brief [Reducing Student Absenteeism](#)
6. EdResearch for Action brief [Strengthening School Connectedness To Increase Student Success](#)
7. EdResearch for Action brief [Accelerating Student Academic Recovery](#)
8. EdResearch for Action brief [Design Principles for Accelerating Student Learning With High-Impact Tutoring](#)
9. EdResearch for Action brief [Design Principles for Academic Summer Learning Programs](#)