

# Coherence Framework

We developed the PELP Coherence Framework to help leaders recognize the interdependence of various aspects of their school district – its culture, systems and structures, resources, stakeholder relationships, and environment – and to understand how they reinforce one another to support the implementation of an improvement strategy. The framework has roots in what business has taught us about organizational alignment. However, that knowledge has been elaborated by what we know about reform in education. Throughout its development, the framework has been informed by our interactions with senior leaders of large urban districts who face unique managerial challenges because of the size and complexity of their school systems, and often because of the poverty of the communities they serve as well. Putting a district-wide strategy into practice requires building a coherent organization that connects to teachers' work in classrooms and enables people at all levels to carry out their part of the strategy. The framework identifies the organizational elements critical to high performance and poses a series of diagnostic questions about each element, all in an effort to bring them into coherence with the strategy and with each other.

The framework assists with achieving and sustaining coherence by:

- Connecting the instructional core with a district-wide strategy for improvement.
- Highlighting district elements that can support or hinder effective implementation.
- Identifying interdependencies among district elements.
- Recognizing forces in the environment that have an impact on the implementation of strategy.

Key framework elements include:

**Instructional core:** The core includes                      Adapted from Tushman and O'Reilly's Congruence Model, 2002  
three interdependent components: teachers' knowledge and skill, students' engagement in their own learning, and academically challenging content.

**Theory of Change:** The organization's belief about the relationships between certain actions and desired outcomes, often phrased as an "if... then..." statement. This theory links the mission of increased performance for all students to the strategy the organization will use to achieve that goal.

**Strategy:** A coherent set of actions a district deliberately undertakes to strengthen the instructional core with the objective of raising student performance district-wide. Gaining coherence among actions at the district, school, and classroom levels will make a district's chosen strategy more scalable and sustainable.

**Stakeholders:** The people and groups inside and outside of the district - district and school staff, governing bodies, unions and associations, parents and parent organizations, civic and community leaders and organizations.

**Culture:** The predominant norms, values, and attitudes that define and drive behavior in the district.

**Structure:** Structures help define how the work of the district gets done. It includes how people are organized, who has responsibility and accountability for results, and who makes or influences decisions.

Structures can be both formal (deliberately established organizational forms) and informal (the way

decisions get made or the way people work and interact outside of formal channels).

**Systems:** School districts manage themselves through a variety of systems, which are the processes and procedures through which work gets done. Systems are built around such important functions as career development and promotion, compensation, student assignment, resource allocation, organizational learning, and measurement and accountability. Most practically, systems help people feel like they do not have to "reinvent the wheel" when they need to get an important, and often multi-step, task done.

**Resources:** Managing the flow of financial resources throughout the organization is important, but resources also include people and physical assets such as technology and data. When school districts carefully manage their most valuable resource--people--and understand what investments in technology and data systems are necessary to better support teaching and learning, the entire organization is brought closer to coherence.

**Environment:** A district's environment includes all the external factors that can have an impact on strategy, operations, and performance (i.e. regulations and statutes, contracts, funding and politics).

### **Printer-friendly version**