

# Thinking Through Improvement

Tools and Strategies to Guide  
Improvement Efforts

# Development Process

- Responded to need identified by Region 4 states
- Drafted content outlines and concept paper
- Convened multidisciplinary Reviewer's Group
- Compiled extensive feedback and restructured the design of the product
- Solicited feedback from Reviewer's Group regarding revised structure and content

# Important Ideas

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- *Thinking Through Improvement* provides tools and strategies to guide improvement efforts
- Process can be used by both state and local agencies to address the State Performance Plan (SPP) and other areas identified for improvement

# Components of the IT Kit

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- IT Book
  - Participant Workbook
- IT Tools
  - Improvement Planning Materials
- IT Guide
  - Facilitator Guide

# Content Overview

- Thinking About Connections
  - Understanding the federal-state-local connection
  - Meeting the local responsibility of IDEA 2004
- Thinking About Data
  - Defining data
  - Identifying quality data
  - Finding meaning in data
- Thinking About Results
  - PIER Process

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# Part One

## Thinking About Connections

# Important Ideas for Part One

- Participants will —
  - Understand federal, state, and local educational accountability
  - Identify characteristics and responsibilities of a local Improvement Team (IT Team)
  - Identify the components of a local Improvement Plan (IT Plan)

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# Chapter One

## Understanding the Federal- State-Local Connection

# Important Ideas for Chapter One

- State and local programs are involved in the accountability process and are federally mandated to meet the responsibilities of IDEA 2004.
- Accountability measures have been established to ensure that the responsibilities of IDEA 2004 are being met at all levels.

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# Chapter Two

## Meeting the Local Responsibility of IDEA 2004

# Important Ideas for Chapter Two

- Addressing the requirements and local responsibilities of IDEA 2004 is a process that involves a team (IT Team) and a plan (IT Plan)
- IT Teams should be broad-based and involve both general and special education professionals
- To be effective, the improvement process should stress utility and efficiency, and be integrated with existing activities whenever possible

# Purpose of the IT Team

- Provide oversight and guidance to the local improvement process
- Structure improvement planning
- Establish procedures necessary for creating a local improvement plan
- Manage data-driven improvement process and procedures

# Critical Components of the IT Plan

- **Who** will be responsible for the improvement activity?
- **What** will be accomplished by the improvement activity?
- **When** will the improvement activity be accomplished?
- **How** will the improvement activity be accomplished?

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# Part Two

## Thinking About Data

# Important Ideas for Part Two

- Participants will —
  - Understand that information gathered from data guides improvement efforts
  - Understand that quality data are essential for identifying system wide strengths and weaknesses
  - Acquire techniques needed to complete a thorough review of data to assist in determining areas for improvement

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# Chapter Three

## Defining Data

# Using Data for Improvement

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- Provide insight and focus for determining areas for improvement
- Reveal strengths and weaknesses in the system
- Inform team of impact of improvement activities

# Gathering the Data

- Develop plan for gathering the data needed —
  - Who will be responsible
  - What data will be collected
  - Where data can be found
  - When data will be collected
  - How data will be collected, organized, and stored

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# Chapter Four

## Addressing Data Quality

# Elements of Quality Data

- Reliability
  - Comparable or consistent over time
- Validity
  - Represent what was intended to be measured
- Accuracy
  - Clear, strict guidelines for data entry

# Elements of Quality Data

- Practicality
  - Collection affordable and as straightforward as possible
- Relevance
  - Appropriate for purposes for which they are needed

# Improving Data Quality

- Consider the adequacy and quality of its current data in regards to addressing areas for improvement
- Review policies, practices, and procedures specific to data collection and analysis
- Develop process for addressing data issues —
  - Utilize team structure
  - Assess strengths, weaknesses, trends, and patterns of current system

# Do We Need More?

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- Know where you are and where you want to go
- Avoid gathering duplicative data
- Demonstrate strong rationale for additional data

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# Chapter Five

## Finding Meaning in Data

# Important Ideas

- Analyzing, interpreting, and using data is fundamental to successful and sustained improvement
- A thorough review of data will help the team determine areas for improvement
- Comparisons, disaggregation, and trend analyses give meaning to raw data

# Analyzing Data Patterns

- Review data to uncover important patterns and relationships among the data
- Ask the right questions of your data
- Be aware of the difference between what is good to know and what is necessary to know
- Concentrate on priorities

# Analyzing Data Patterns

- Develop hypotheses to explain potential underlying causes of areas needing improvement
- Determined by review of data analysis patterns and team consensus
- Use variety of methods —
  - Scanning
  - Making comparisons
  - Disaggregating

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# Part Three

## Thinking About Results

# The PIER Process

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**P** = Prioritizing Areas for Improvement

**I** = Identifying Improvement Activities

**E** = Evaluating Process and Impact

**R** = Reporting Results

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# Chapter Six

## Prioritizing Areas for Improvement

# Important Ideas

- Areas for improvement may be identified by the State, the IT Team, or both
- Areas for improvement may need to be prioritized if multiple areas are identified
- Targets for improvement should be specific and measurable
- Benchmarks should be used when an area for improvement will be addressed for multiple years

# The Need to Prioritize

- Helps to address multiple areas identified for improvement
- Develop a consensus building process
- Consider local context
- Identify the magnitude of need
- Determine how best to proceed given available resources

# All Things Considered

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- Use data to examine patterns of change
- Understand that areas identified for improvement may change when new information becomes available
- Consider local context and particular circumstances

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# Chapter Seven

## Identifying Improvement Activities

# Important Ideas

- Research-based improvement activities should be used to address areas for improvement whenever possible
- After selecting improvement activities, the team needs to consider how to manage the activities by developing an action plan, timeline, and defining the persons responsible for follow-through
- The team needs to identify available and sufficient resources to initiate the implementation of the improvement activities

# Making a Decision

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- Considerations —
  - Implemented effectively in similar setting
  - Can be tailored to reflect specific local circumstances
- Components of activity (materials needed, cost, personnel) make implementation feasible

# Putting It All Together

- Describe the improvement activity selected
- Develop action steps for each improvement activity selected
- Determine timelines for implementation of improvement activities
- Identify key personnel to implement improvement activities
- Determine and allocate resources

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# Chapter Eight

## Evaluating Process and Impact

# Evaluating Process

- Assesses how well the improvement activity is being implemented
- Identifies strengths and weaknesses in the implementation of the improvement activity
- Dictates whether or not adjustments need to be made
- Review data on a continuous basis

# Evaluating Impact

- Measures the effect the improvement activity has had on the identified area for improvement
- Indicates the extent to which the goals of the improvement activity have been met and assesses the effects of the improvement activity

# Developing a Plan for Evaluation

- Identify the goal of the evaluation
- Frame the evaluation questions to be answered
- Identify evaluation methods and measurement options
- Identify data sources
- Determine data analysis techniques
- Establish timelines

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# Chapter Nine

## Reporting Progress

# Preparing to Report

- Determine who needs to know
  - Audience identification
  - Critical stakeholders
- Identify what they need to know
  - Craft the message
  - Present in an organized manner

# Strategies for Reporting

- Communicate what the data means
- Keep things as simple and straightforward as possible
- Provide context and perspective whenever possible to increase understanding
- Explain challenges and their implications as clearly and simply as possible

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# Implementation Strategies

# Implementation Strategies

- Two-day facilitation session with State Leadership Teams
  - State Leadership Team Membership
  - Facilitation done collaboratively by NCRRC Staff and RRC Staff from the Region

# Implementation Strategies

- On-going technical assistance as part of NCRRC/RRC work with the State
  - Facilitation as Part of a Technical Assistance Plan (TAP)
  - Community of Practice
  - Follow-up sessions as determined

# Implementation Strategies

- Evaluating impact and process
  - Data gathered throughout the training and facilitation
  - Longitudinal data gathered to measure impact and fidelity of implementation

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