Lessons Learned in Developing and Implementing a Continuous Improvement Model

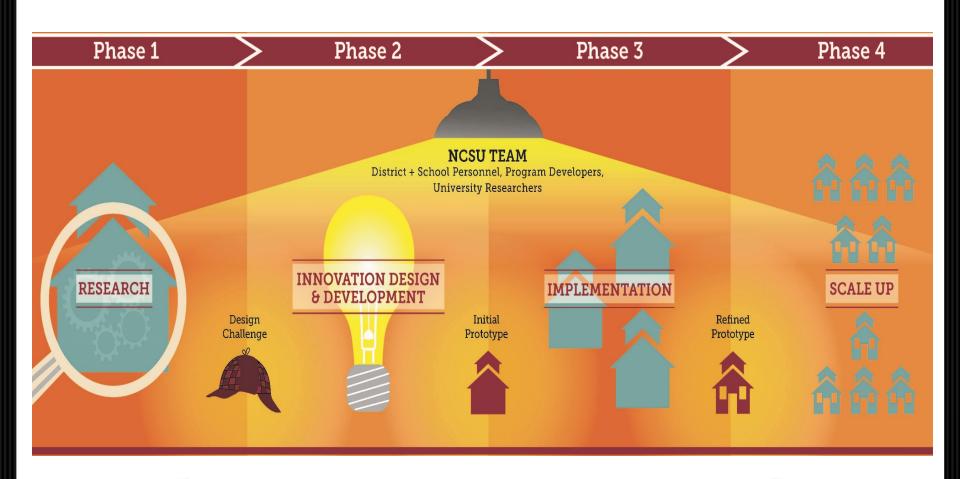## Chris Harrison / Chris Redding / Stephanie Brown

The NCSU Partnership

- Five Research Universities
  - Vanderbilt University, University of North Carolina, Florida State University, University of Wisconsin, Georgia State University

- Developer
  - Education Development Center (EDC)

- Two large urban districts
  - Broward County Public Schools (FL)
  - Fort Worth Independent School District (TX)

The NCSU's Model for Improvement

A Systematic Study of Our Process

- BCPS and FWISD NCSU teams engage in extensive data collection throughout process

- Data analyzed using analytic framework leveraging both *a priori* codes and constructs emerging from the data
  - Text / photographs analyzed using NVivo 10
  - Audio "transcribed" using reflection forms prompting researchers to capture excerpts and synthesize information related to analytic framework.

- Analysis was multi-staged, proceeding roughly in line with the "phases" outlined in the model.
  - Findings from each phase informed the analysis of data from subsequent phases.

Overview of "Process Data"

Data Type	BCPS	FWISD	Total
Meeting audio	498 hours	172 hours	670 hours
Feedback surveys	260	294	554
Field note logs	46	63	109
Artifacts	291	509	800
Reflection Forms	7	15	22
Interview Transcripts	110	47	157

Chronology of the Process

Building PASL	Phase 1 (Research) •Fall 2011 – Spring 2012	Phase 2 (Design & Development) •Fall 2012 – Spring 2014	Phase 3 (Implementation) • Fall 2014 – Spring 2015	Phase 4 (Scale) Fall 2015 - future

Building SOAR	Phase 1 (Research) •Fall 2011 – Spring 2012	Phase 2 (Design & Development) •Spring 2013 – Summer 2013	Phase 3 (Phased Implementation) • Fall 2013 – Spring 2015	Phase 4 (Scale) Fall 2015 - future

THE NATIONAL CENTER ON
SCALING UP
EFFECTIVE SCHOOLS

A Closer Look: Findings from the Process in BCPS

- Participants in the process found it difficult to grapple with questions of design and development in the absence of clear information regarding capacity, resources, and support.

- Negotiating the process of bringing the PASL innovation to an "implementable" state necessitated a systematic method for "testing" ideas: PDSA
  - While "planning" and "doing" appeared to be successful aspects of the PDSA process, significant questions surrounded the process of "studying" and "acting"

A Closer Look: Findings from the Process in BCPS

- Shifts in the district environment, and lack of clarity regarding the balance between "top down" and "bottom up" nature of the work, required the team to re-think the role and membership of the DIDT.

Early Lessons from Implementing the Process in BCPS

- Development, like design, must occur with implementation in mind

- Utilizing a framework for implementation and scale -- like PDSA/Continuous Improvement -- requires careful planning for and integration of that framework from the beginning of the process

A Closer Look: Findings from the Process in FWISD

- **Adaptations from the BCPS Process**
  - SIDT members were integrated earlier in the process for the development work with the innovation schools.
  - PDSA was introduced at the beginning of the development process enabling its integration with other elements of the development process.
- Despite the focus on a common district team, members from the innovation schools consistently thought about creating a design that would be implemented at their school.
- Initially, "planning" and "doing" were successful aspects of the PDSA process, while SIDTs were less likely to engage in "studying" and "acting." Over time, the focus of PDSA shifted to the implementation of practices rather than the testing of practices.

Lessons Learned from the Process in FWISD

- The openness to consensus in the design and development process helped build commitment to the innovation design. At the same time, the involvement of multiple school and district stakeholders limited the ability to create a specific, actionable innovation.

- Allowing teams to focus on their school context helped to move towards actionable practices but diminished commonalities across the schools.

Lessons Learned from the Process in FWISD

- When integrating PDSA into the design process, it is vital to distinguish between data for improvement and accountability.
  - Implementation teams recognized the importance of *outcome data* in demonstrating the effectiveness of the innovation to secure district support for scale up.
  - Teams were more likely to use *perceptual data* for improvements.

Overarching Lessons

- Development in the context of partnership requires careful (and likely continual) identification, management, and acquisition of capacity over time.

- Without processes facilitating inter-organizational learning and communication, there may be tension between adapting innovations individual contexts and scaling them to new contexts.

Overarching Lessons

- While a "bottom up" emphasis may facilitate buy-in, depth of implementation, and shift in ownership, "top down" support is important for sustaining implementation and scale.

Concluding Thoughts

- Implementation of the Center's model for improvement required adaptation and learning over time.
  - Each partner had to acquire new capacities as the process moved from phase to phase.
  - Role flexibility became a defining characteristic of the work.
- While this kind of process has significant promise, it may require us to re-conceptualize institutional boundaries in sometimes uncomfortable ways.

Questions for the Future

- As each innovation shifts toward "scale":

  – How do the roles of practitioner partners, developers, and researchers change as we shift from *testing* and *doing* to *sustaining* and *spreading*?

  – How will the partnership adapt as the formal structure of the Center changes?