

The Stages of Systemic Change

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By analyzing where they are on the continuum of educational change, stakeholders can see where they still may need to go.

At first I didn't see the magnitude of the change. I thought if we just did better what we had always done, we would be OK. Then I realized we had to do something totally different, but I didn't know what. Gradually we began trying some new approaches. One change led to another and another and another, like dominos. I started to see what people meant by systemic change. A new energy and excitement surged among us as hope grew and the cloudy vision of what we wanted became clearer and clearer.

—Principal of a restructuring high school

Administrators across the United States are recognizing that the education system needs fundamental changes to keep pace with an increasingly complex global society. Yet, the deeper we get into the process of change, the more confused we can become. We need some sense of what to expect and what direction to take. Seeing the patterns of change can be difficult; stakeholders in a system tend to see change primarily from their own perspective. Often teachers may not understand what is seen by administrators and parents, nor do administrators or parents see change from a teacher's perspective, or from each other's.

To give stakeholders an aerial view of the

shifts occurring in educational systems, the matrix "A Continuum of Systemic Change" defines six developmental stages and six key elements of change (see fig. 1). A composite of experiences in systemic change from across the United States and at all levels of education, the matrix provides stakeholders with a common vantage point for communicating and making decisions about change.

Stages of Systemic Change

Six stages of change characterize the shift from a traditional educational

system to one that emphasizes interconnectedness, active learning, shared decision making, and higher levels of achievement for all students. Although Figure 1 displays the six developmental stages as linear and distinct, change is unlikely to follow a linear path. An education system will seldom be clearly at one of these stages but will usually experience "Brownian motion," going back and forth from one stage to another on the path toward an ideal situation. The six stages are:

Maintenance of the Old System: Educators focus on maintaining the system as originally designed. They do not recognize that the system is fundamentally out of sync with the conditions of today's world. New knowledge about teaching, learning, and organizational structures has not been incorporated into the present structure.

Awareness: Multiple stakeholders become aware that the current system is not working as well as it should, but they are unclear about what is needed instead.

Exploration: Educators and policymakers study and visit places that are trying new approaches. They try new ways of teaching and managing, generally in low-risk situations.

Transition: The scales tip toward the new system; a critical number of opinion leaders and groups commit themselves to the new system and take more risks to make changes in crucial places.

Emergence of New Infrastructure: Some elements of the system are operated in keeping with the desired new system. These new ways are generally accepted.

Predominance of the New System:



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As stakeholders, students can often provide valuable input during restructuring efforts.

The more powerful elements of the system operate as defined by the new system. Key leaders begin to envision even better systems.

Key Elements to Change

As schools, districts, and states move through the six developmental stages, six elements of the education system seem to be particularly important. Monitoring these six elements can help us understand an education system's progress.

Vision: The vision that people have of an education system and what it should accomplish must change in order for the system to change. Through the stages of development, the number of people from different groups who agree on the shape and purpose of the new system increases.

Public and Political Support: As the vision develops and is translated into practice, the support of the public and of the political leadership at all levels of the system must grow. Such support involves a deepening understanding of the *what* and *why* of the

changes needed. The inclusion of diverse populations appears to be critical in building support.

Networking: Building networks that study, pilot, and support the new vision of the education system is essential in establishing lasting systemic change. These networks typically do not rely on the existing bureaucratic structure. They frequently use computers, newsletters, conferences, and personal communications to link people of similar roles across existing organizational lines.

Teaching and Learning Changes: Teaching and learning based on the best available research on how people learn is at the core of the new system. Closely related is the perspective that all students need and can learn the higher-level skills of understanding, communication, problem solving, decision making, and teamwork. If changes do not occur in teaching and learning, all the other changes have little value.

Administrative Roles and Responsibilities: To achieve change in the classroom, administrative roles and

responsibilities need to shift at the school, district, and state levels from a hierarchical structure of control to one of support and shared decision making.

Policy Alignment:

State and local policy need to be aligned around the beliefs and practices of the new system, particularly in areas related to curriculum frameworks, instructional methods and materials, student assessment practices, resource allocation, and the inclusion of all types of students.

Making simultaneous changes in all six elements requires conscious planning. The process is akin to remodeling a building while people are still using it; redesign and reconfiguration need to be carefully staged to keep the building functional.

Using the Matrix

The matrix "A Continuum of Systemic Change" is proving particularly valuable in three ways. Educators are using it to:

1. *Develop a common language and conceptual picture of the processes and goals of change among diverse stakeholders.* Once stakeholders can see the issues and perspectives of the others, they are better positioned to take actions that will support and enhance others' specific situations. One of the nation's earliest and largest restructuring efforts, Re:Learning, used frameworks similar to this matrix to develop common understandings

The Continuum of Systemic Change

Stages of Change

Elements of Change	Maintenance of Old System	Awareness	Exploration
Vision	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> ■ Vision reflects: <ul style="list-style-type: none"> ■ Learning based on seat time ■ Teaching as lecture ■ Mandates and inputs ■ Education system separate from social service systems 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> ■ Multiple stakeholders realize need to change ■ Strategic plans call for fundamental changes 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> ■ Stakeholder groups promote new ideas for parts of system ■ New examples debated ■ Growing numbers and types of stakeholders drawn together
Public and Political Support	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> ■ Support taken for granted ■ Only a concern when finances are needed ■ Public informed, not engaged 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> ■ Policymakers, media discuss need for changes ■ Public forums on change 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> ■ Task forces formed ■ Leaders speak on some issues ■ Minor resource allocations ■ Public involved in redefining learning outcomes
Networking	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> ■ Networking seen as insignificant ■ Partnerships are one-shot, supplemental 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> ■ Networking valued ■ A critical mass of teachers explore joining networks ■ Realization that partnerships need to be longer-term, integral 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> ■ Networks (including electronic) share information ■ Schools, districts, and states join networks ■ School leaders contact potential partners
Teaching and Learning Changes	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> ■ Emphasis on: <ul style="list-style-type: none"> ■ Standard curriculum ■ Delivery of Information ■ Standardized tests ■ Raising scores 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> ■ Recognition that current research is not used in teaching, and that education problems are due to broad social, economic, technological changes 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> ■ Resources committed to learning new teaching methods; multiyear commitments ■ New modes of assessment explored ■ Outcomes are defined
Administrative Roles and Responsibilities	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> ■ Responsibilities seen as: <ul style="list-style-type: none"> ■ Diminishing conflict ■ Emphasizing standardization, rules ■ Providing information ■ Top-down decision making 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> ■ Administrators recognize need to change roles ■ New roles, responsibilities discussed ■ Media attention on innovative leaders 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> ■ Site-based decision making piloted ■ Professional development focuses on new roles ■ Bureaucracy questioned ■ Some resources allocated to learning outcomes
Policy Alignment	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> ■ Policy emphasizes: <ul style="list-style-type: none"> ■ Textbook selection ■ Standardized teaching, tests ■ Comparisons among schools on student achievement ■ Hierarchical structure 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> ■ Experimentation promoted ■ Recognition that standardized tests don't measure all learning outcomes; low achievement may be due to conditions beyond teaching 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> ■ New assessments explored ■ Policies defining graduation based on demonstrated learning piloted ■ Curriculums emphasize higher learning for all

Note: Users may add features to the matrix cells to better depict their situation. Not all features of every stage have been included.

If changes do not occur in teaching and learning, all the other changes have little value.

and to engage multiple stakeholders in discussions about the goals and strategies of systemic change.

2. *Develop a strategic plan for moving forward on systemic change.* Once systemic change is under way, people often feel overwhelmed by the magnitude of the task. A matrix such as this one can be used to specify what steps to take next.

For example, state mathematics and

science curriculum directors used the matrix at a national conference to analyze their own state's progress on systemic change. Many found that they were moving along reasonably well with the vision, the policy realignment, and the shifts in administrative roles, but changes in classroom teaching were small, and public support was lagging. They realized these areas needed special attention if

Transition	Emergence of New Infrastructure	Predominance of New System
<ul style="list-style-type: none"> ■ Emerging consensus ■ Old components shed ■ Need for linkages understood 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> ■ Vision includes student outcomes, system structure, underlying beliefs ■ Continual refinement of vision, expanded involvement 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> ■ Belief that all students can learn at higher levels ■ Learning is achieving and applying knowledge ■ Education connected to social services
<ul style="list-style-type: none"> ■ Public debate ■ Leaders campaign for change ■ Resistant groups vocal ■ More resources allocated ■ Diversity recognized 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> ■ Ongoing task forces ■ Resources are ongoing; emphasis on meeting diverse student needs ■ Public engaged in change 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> ■ Public, political, business involvement essential ■ Allocation of resources based on new vision
<ul style="list-style-type: none"> ■ Networks recognized as long-term features ■ Debates on how to support ongoing networks ■ Disenfranchised groups use networks for empowerment 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> ■ Networks accepted practice; major source of new knowledge ■ Empowerment issues debated ■ Multiple partners support vision 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> ■ Resources allocated for networks ■ Networks serve as major communication channels ■ Power is shared
<ul style="list-style-type: none"> ■ Teachers, schools, districts try new approaches ■ Teachers given time to plan ■ Recognition of change needed and resources required ■ Changes assessed 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> ■ Assessments encourage improvement, recognize uneven progress ■ Graduation based on outcomes ■ Teaching engages students ■ Ongoing teacher development 	<p>In most schools:</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> ■ Student learning is active ■ Assessments are focused on outcomes ■ Teacher and administrator preparation uses outcomes
<ul style="list-style-type: none"> ■ Methods developed to distribute decision making ■ Emphasis on outcomes to be achieved; flexibility in how ■ Resources for ongoing teacher professional development 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> ■ Administrators hired using new criteria ■ Site-based decision making ■ School-community councils ■ Teachers responsible for instructional decisions 	<p>Administrators:</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> ■ Encourage rethinking, improvement, innovation ■ Allocate resources to support student learning ■ Use site-based management
<ul style="list-style-type: none"> ■ Task forces define learning outcomes ■ Schools have latitude to redesign teaching and learning ■ Recognition that policies need review 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> ■ Exit outcomes developed, emphasize complex learning ■ Multiple means of assessment ■ Major review of policy ■ Education and social service policies connected 	<p>Policy supports:</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> ■ Ongoing improvement ■ High student standards ■ Learning outcomes ■ Flexible instruction ■ Alternative assessment

the full system was to change.

3. *Develop an ongoing assessment process to support and encourage deep, quality change.* The matrix can provide the basis for deciding the focus of an evaluation, the type of data to collect, and the modes of analysis and reporting. An organization funding changes in science instruction based its evaluation tool on the matrix. In another state, districts and commu-

nities used the matrix to evaluate their progress in redesigning arts education.

For systemic change to occur, all aspects of the system must move forward. A physician doesn't say, "Well, I guess I won't worry too much about that heart problem. The rest of the body seems fine." By adapting this matrix to their own systems, educators can help stakeholders rise above their singular viewpoints to a more compre-

hensive perspective of the changes occurring. By nurturing all aspects of the education system, we can bring about the systemic change that will transform education. ■

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