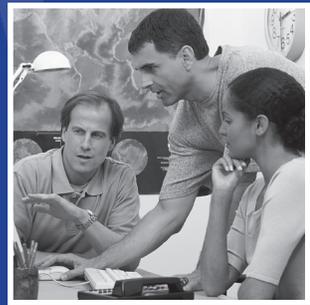


# MICHIGAN'S SCHOOL IMPROVEMENT FRAMEWORK: CONVERSATION STARTER KIT



## INTRODUCTION

The School Improvement Framework and its attendant Rubrics are designed to help all school personnel, both professional and non-professional engage in serious and deep conversation about their school, its curriculum, its policies and its practices as they relate to student achievement. As such, it is a vehicle for elevating the discourse that faculty has about what's going on in their schools and about the nature of instruction in their classrooms. To be sure, this is not an easy task. However, the attached School Improvement Conversation Starter Kit Flowchart is designed to help school staff hold such conversations.

The Flowchart identifies 5 levels of conversation that should occur among faculties within schools to address the issues contained in the School Improvement Framework. The first two levels are really aimed at simply raising the awareness levels of all staff about the SIF and its associated Rubrics. "What are they, What do they mean to us, How do we use them?" are questions that are addressed at these two levels. While these first two levels may seem rather basic, they actually address a key issue of school improvement: how do we hold conversations among staff about our practice, that is, what we individually do in our classrooms with others about what they do in their classrooms. The Balanced Leadership material calls this the tension of going from "private to public" about our teaching practices.

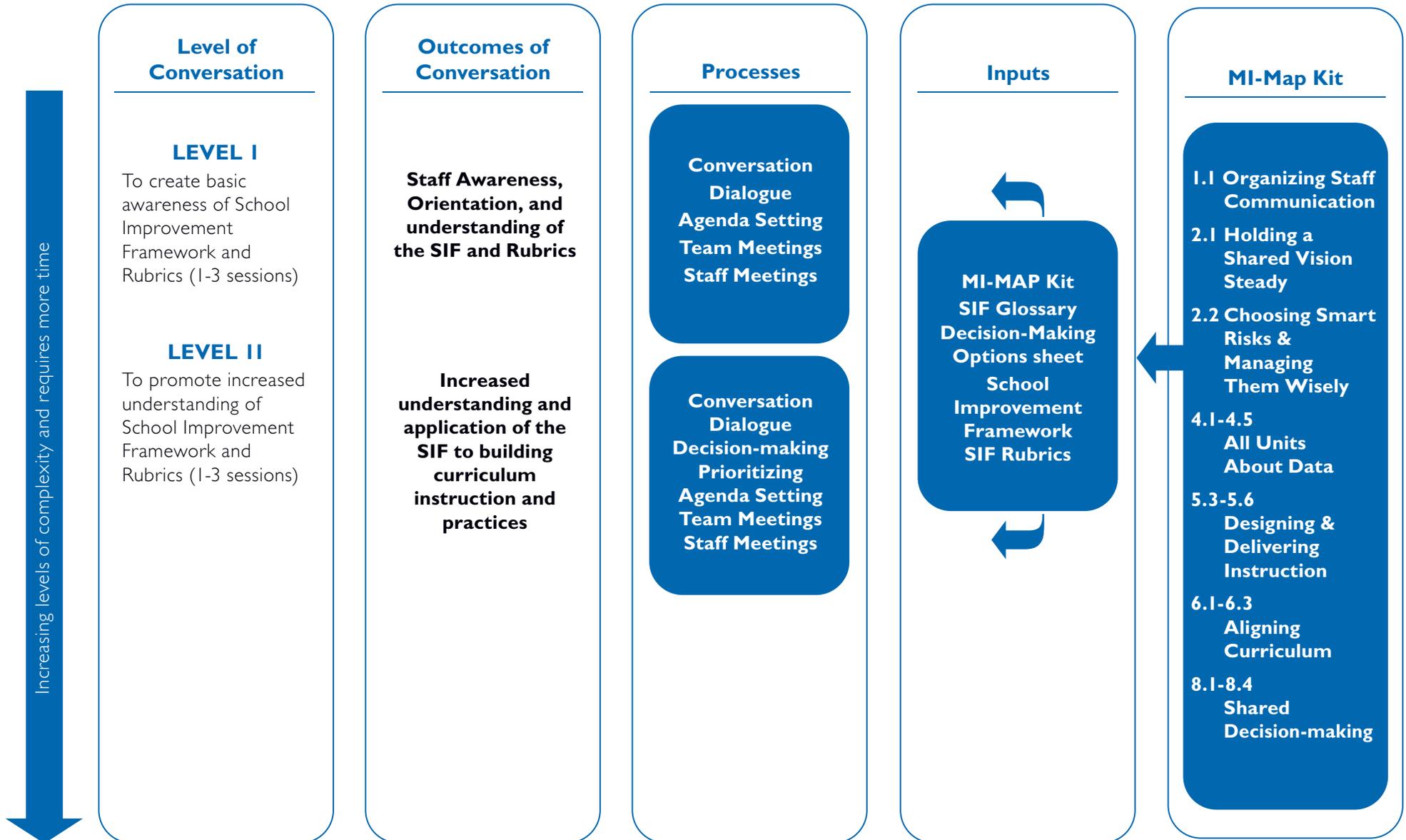
As staff become familiar with the organization of the framework, its language and concepts, and its utility to their work, the conversations become more complex and increasingly "deeper" in addressing issues of curriculum, teaching and learning and instruction within the school. More facilitation tools are needed at these last three levels.

The end result of these five levels of conversation is a much deeper understanding and appreciation for the five Strands contained in the Framework and their interrelationship to the work done in the schools.

An experienced facilitator has stated that the learning "is not in the journey, it's in the landing!" In other words, how do we take all this exciting learning back home! What we do when we get back home to our individual schools to roll out the School Improvement Framework and Rubrics is the key element to successfully implement the Framework into the ongoing operations of the school. The following chart illustrates one way to get the conversations started back home.

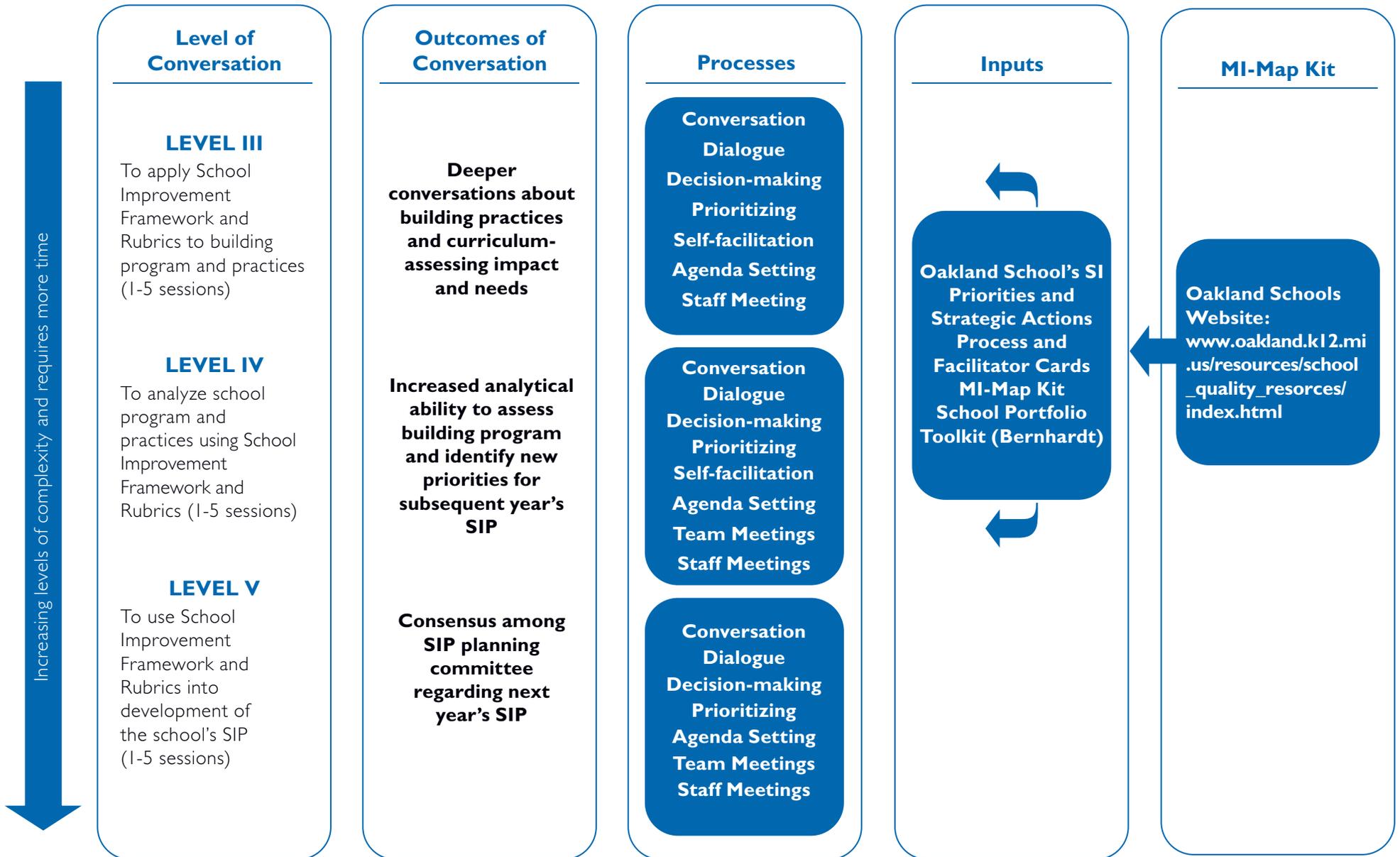
# School Improvement Conversation Starter Kit Flowchart

## AWARENESS



# School Improvement Conversation Starter Kit Flowchart

## APPLICATIONS



**LEVELS I AND II CONVERSATIONS: BUILDING AWARENESS & UNDERSTANDING OF THE SCHOOL IMPROVEMENT FRAMEWORK**

<b>Session 1</b>	<p><b>Introduction &amp; Creating Awareness</b></p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• SIF PowerPoint</li> <li>• Index Card Activity: Identifying Current Understanding of School Improvement                     <ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>–Index cards are distributed to all participants. They are asked to list at least 3 words that come to mind when they hear the phrase “continuous school improvement.” (one word per card)</li> <li>–Participants will then tape their cards to 5 flipchart sheets labeled by one of the 5 strands according to what they think is the best “fit.”</li> </ul> </li> </ul>
<b>Session 2</b>	<p><b>Developing Understanding</b></p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• Review of Session 1 Activity</li> <li>• Small Group Activity: Divide Group by Strands &amp; Review Benchmarks to Identify:                     <ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>–What surprises you?                      –What doesn’t surprise you?</li> <li>–What are the key elements?</li> </ul> </li> <li>• Report Outs by Strands-Chart Commonalities</li> </ul>
<b>Session 3</b>	<p><b>Going Deeper into the SIF</b></p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• Review of Session 2 Outcomes</li> <li>• Focus on Strand I: Teaching for Learning                     <ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>–Activity: Participants are grouped into the following three groups: Instruction, Curriculum and Assessment (Standards)</li> <li>–Each group will Use the Oakland Schools Strategy Cards to Identify evidences/practices about the Benchmarks in these Standards (see attached Activity Description and Strategy Cards)</li> </ul> </li> </ul>

**LEVELS I AND II: BUILDING AWARENESS & UNDERSTANDING OF THE SIF RUBRICS**

<b>Session 1</b>	<p><b>Introduction &amp; Creating Awareness</b></p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• Rubrics PowerPoint</li> <li>• Index Card Activity: Identifying Current Understanding of Rubrics                     <ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>– Index cards are distributed to all participants. They are asked to list at least 3 words that come to mind when they hear the phrase “rubrics.” (one word per card)</li> <li>– Participants will then tape their cards to 5 flipchart sheets labeled by one of the 5 strands according to what they think is the best “fit.”</li> </ul> </li> </ul>
<b>Session 2</b>	<p><b>Developing Understanding</b></p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• Review of Session 1 Activity</li> <li>• Small Group Activity: Divide Group by Strands &amp; Review Rubrics to Identify:                     <ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>–What surprises you?                      –What doesn’t surprise you?</li> <li>–What are the key elements?</li> </ul> </li> <li>• Report outs by Strands-chart commonalities</li> </ul>
<b>Session 3</b>	<p><b>Analyzing the School Environment</b></p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• Review of Session 2 Outcomes</li> <li>• Focus on Strand 4: Schools &amp; Community Relations                     <ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>–Activity: Participants are grouped into the two Standards for this Strand.</li> <li>–Each group will take 5 minutes to “predict” how a “typical” school in their district might describe itself on each benchmark. (chart on a flipchart pad using a color marker)</li> <li>–Each group will then brainstorm about “What is surprising and different about our school?” (record responses on previous flipchart using a different color marker)</li> <li>–Review and assess commonalities/differences.</li> </ul> </li> </ul>

At minimum, six sessions would be needed to ensure that there is sufficient awareness and understanding of the School Improvement Framework and Rubrics to proceed to deeper levels of conversation as illustrated in the Conversation Starter Kit Flowchart. It is essential that school personnel develop increased capacities to hold these conversations. Future sessions will focus on Levels 3-5. For now, this suggested outline of sessions would make for a good beginning. Attached are more detailed Agendas and a concise Facilitator’s Tip Sheet that could be used to have a good “landing!”

**SAMPLE AGENDA (1 HOUR)**  
**BUILDING AWARENESS & UNDERSTANDING OF THE SCHOOL IMPROVEMENT FRAMEWORK**

<b>LEVEL I AND II CONVERSATIONS (SESSION 1)</b>	
<b>10 minutes</b>	<p><b>Welcome and Introduction to the School Improvement Framework</b>                      Initial Activity: Identifying Current Understanding of School Improvement</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• Index cards are distributed to all participants. They are asked to list at least 3 words that come to mind when they hear the phrase "continuous school improvement." (one word per card)</li> <li>• Participants will then tape their cards to 5 flipchart sheets labeled by one of the 5 strands according to what they think is the best "fit."</li> </ul>
<b>20 minutes</b>	<p><b>Orientation to the School Improvement Framework</b></p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• SIF PowerPoint</li> </ul>
<b>20 minutes</b>	<p><b>Group Reflection</b></p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• What do we notice about our distribution of cards?</li> <li>• Do all the strands have cards?</li> <li>• What does this mean for our school?</li> </ul>
<b>10 minutes</b>	<p><b>Questions about the SIF</b></p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• What more do I need to know about the SIF to get a better understanding of what it is?</li> </ul>

**Note:** The following items should be word processed and made available for the next session:

- The five flipchart pages labeled by strands containing the group's index cards
- Reflection questions
- SIF questions

**SAMPLE AGENDA (1 HOUR)**  
**BUILDING AWARENESS & UNDERSTANDING OF THE SCHOOL IMPROVEMENT FRAMEWORK**

<b>LEVEL I AND II CONVERSATIONS (SESSION 2)</b>	
<b>5 minutes</b>	<b>Welcome and Introduction of Session 2</b>
<b>10 minutes</b>	<b>Review of Session I Index Card Activity and Reflection Questions</b>
<b>30 minutes</b>	<p><b>Developing Understanding Small Group Activity</b></p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• Divide group by the 5 Strands &amp; review Benchmarks contained in each strand to Identify:                             <ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>–What surprises you?</li> <li>–What doesn't surprise you?</li> <li>–What are the key elements?</li> </ul> </li> <li>• Report Outs by Strands                             <ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>–Each strand group will develop a matrix of the three questions above as a basis for reporting out to the total group</li> </ul> </li> <li>• Chart Commonalities                             <ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>–Group facilitator records commonalities on a flipchart page for the group.</li> </ul> </li> </ul>
<b>10 minutes</b>	<b>Review and Reflection of the session's work</b>
<b>5 minutes</b>	<p><b>Questions about the SIF</b></p> <p>What more do I need to know about the SIF to get a better understanding of what it is?</p>

**Note:** The following items should be word processed and made available for the next session:

- Reflection questions
- SIF questions

**SAMPLE AGENDA (1 HOUR)**  
**BUILDING AWARENESS & UNDERSTANDING OF THE SCHOOL IMPROVEMENT FRAMEWORK**

<b>LEVEL I AND II CONVERSATIONS (SESSION 3)</b>	
<b>5 minutes</b>	<b>Welcome and Introduction of Session 3</b>
<b>5 minutes</b>	<b>Review of Session 2 Outcomes and Reflection Questions</b>
<b>30 minutes</b>	<b>Going Deeper into the SIF</b> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• Focus on Strand I: Teaching for Learning</li> <li>–Activity: Participants are grouped into the following three groups: Instruction, Curriculum and Assessment (Standards)</li> <li>–Each Group will use the Oakland Schools Strategy Cards to identify evidences/practices about the Benchmarks in these Standards as they relate to their school(see attached Activity Description and Strategy Cards)</li> </ul>
<b>10 minutes</b>	<b>Report outs by each Standard group</b>
<b>10 minutes</b>	<b>Review and Reflection of the session’s work</b>

**Note:** The following items should be word processed and made available for the next session:

- Standards group report outs

**SAMPLE AGENDA (1 HOUR)**  
**BUILDING AWARENESS & UNDERSTANDING OF THE RUBRICS**

<b>LEVEL I AND II CONVERSATIONS (SESSION 1)</b>	
<b>15 minutes</b>	<b>Welcome and Introduction to the School Improvement Framework Rubrics</b> Initial Activity: Identifying Current Understanding of Rubrics <ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• Index cards are distributed to all participants. They are asked to list at least 3 words that come to mind when they hear the phrase “rubrics.” (one word per card)</li> <li>• Participants will then tape their cards to 5 flipchart sheets labeled by one of the 5 strands according to what they think is the best “fit.”</li> </ul>
<b>15 minutes</b>	<b>Orientation to the School Improvement Framework Rubrics</b> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• SIF Rubrics PowerPoint</li> </ul>
<b>20 minutes</b>	<b>Group Reflection</b> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• What do we notice about our distribution of cards?</li> <li>• Do all the strands have cards?</li> <li>• What does this mean for our school?</li> </ul>
<b>10 minutes</b>	<b>Questions about the SIF Rubrics</b> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• What more do I need to know about the Rubrics to get a better understanding of what they are?</li> </ul>

**Note:** The following items should be word processed and made available for the next session:

- The five flipchart pages labeled by strands containing the group’s index cards
- Reflection questions
- SIF Rubric questions

**SAMPLE AGENDA (1 HOUR)**  
**BUILDING AWARENESS & UNDERSTANDING OF THE RUBRICS**

<b>LEVEL I AND II CONVERSATIONS (SESSION 2)</b>	
<b>5 minutes</b>	<b>Welcome and Introduction of Session 2</b>
<b>10 minutes</b>	<b>Review of Session 1 Index Card Activity and Reflection Questions</b>
<b>30 minutes</b>	<p><b>Developing Understanding Small Group Activity</b></p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• Divide group by the 5 Strands &amp; review the rubrics contained in each strand to Identify:               <ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>–What surprises you?</li> <li>–What doesn't surprise you?</li> <li>–What are the key elements?</li> </ul> </li> <li>• Report Outs by Strands               <ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>–Each strand group will develop a matrix of the three questions above as a basis for reporting out to the total group.</li> </ul> </li> <li>• Chart Commonalities               <ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>–Group facilitator records commonalities on a flipchart page for the group.</li> </ul> </li> </ul>
<b>10 minutes</b>	<b>Review and Reflection of the session's work</b>
<b>5 minutes</b>	<p><b>Questions about the SIF Rubrics</b></p> <p>What more do I need to know about the SIF Rubrics to get a better understanding of what they are?</p>

**Note:** The following items should be word processed and made available for the next session:

- Reflection questions
- SIF questions

**SAMPLE AGENDA (1 HOUR)**  
**BUILDING AWARENESS & UNDERSTANDING OF THE RUBRICS**

<b>LEVEL I AND II CONVERSATIONS (SESSION 3)</b>	
<b>5 minutes</b>	<b>Welcome and Introduction of Session 3</b>
<b>5 minutes</b>	<b>Review of Session 2 Outcomes and Reflection Questions</b>
<b>30 minutes</b>	<p><b>Developing Increased Understanding of the SIF Rubrics</b></p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• Focus on Strand 4: Schools &amp; Community Relations               <ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>–Activity: Participants are grouped into the two Standards for this Strand.</li> <li>–Each group will take 5 minutes to "predict" how a "typical" school in their district might describe itself on each benchmark. (chart on a flipchart pad using a color marker)</li> <li>–Each group will then brainstorm about "What is surprising and different about our school?" (record responses on previous flipchart using a different color marker)</li> <li>–Review and assess commonalities/differences.</li> </ul> </li> </ul>
<b>10 minutes</b>	<b>Review and Reflection of the session's work</b>
<b>10 minutes</b>	<p><b>Questions about the SIF Rubrics</b></p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• What more do I need to know about the Rubrics to get a better understanding of what they are?</li> </ul>

**Note:** The following items should be word processed and made available for the next session:

- Standards group report outs

## FACILITATOR'S TIP SHEET

The facilitator's role is to help establish a collaborative environment in which members of the group function at higher levels of discourse and problem-solving much like a learning community. It can include:

- Draws out individual and group contributions
- Asks thought-provoking questions
- Follows-up with probing questions to get at deeper meaning
- Prepares background information
- Watches pacing, timing and emotional build-ups (maintains flow)
- Is both a team member and impartial process observer
- Insures that all have an opportunity to be heard
- Serves as group memory by charting key issues, decision, and follow-up actions

### Key Facilitation Skills:

**Active Listening:** To be an active listener, you need to show that you accept what the person says because it is true for that person. Acceptance does not imply agreement. You need to for the music behind the words and tune into the speaker's feelings and unspoken themes. Effective, active listeners reflect back to the person what they have heard and ask exploratory or clarifying questions to enhance understanding and reinforce the person's feelings of being listened to and understood. The ability to probe and explore at deeper levels is an essential skill that needs to be continually cultivated and nurtured. Active listeners make frequent summaries and restatements throughout a session.

**Clarifying differing points of view:** To establish a true learning community, a facilitator needs to ensure that all points of view (even opposing ones) are brought to the table, aired, and considered. It is essential that the facilitator remain neutral on the topic or issues while conducting a session.

**Differentiating between feelings, facts, and solutions:** A group may switch back and forth between feelings, facts, and solutions as differing issues are considered. As facilitator, you need to give group members a chance to express their feelings, before attempting to deal with facts. Similarly, you need to avoid facilitating a group to a solution before getting to all of the facts.

**Source:** *Keys 2.0 Facilitation guide, NEA, 2004*