MICIP
MICHIGAN INTEGRATED CONTINUOUS IMPROVEMENT PROCESS

District-Led Continuous Improvement

A Toolkit to Support Continuous Improvement Leaders, Facilitators, and Team Members

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MICHIGAN
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Contents

Introduction

The purpose of the MICIP toolkits is to help a district dig more deeply into topics that are critical to the continuous improvement mindset and process. This toolkit is designed to help a continuous improvement team embrace a mindset that supports a unified district continuous improvement process and creates a cohesive and collaborative community of improvement. By exploring the continuum matrix and reflective questions for shifting from a Culture of Isolation, where the district and school operate independently from each other, to a Culture of Collaboration, where the district and schools work together across different contexts, a district will be able to better understand where in the continuum it stands and what steps may be needed to move towards a desired state. Teams that fully realize this shift should be able to establish a collaborative districtwide process that can lead to a single district-level plan of action with embedded school plans. At the end of this toolkit is a section suggesting what might help facilitator lead this conversation.

Learner Outcomes

- Understand why the shift from isolated district and school continuous improvement to integrated district and school continuous improvement is important.
- Understand the balance of the function, roles, and responsibilities of the district and the roles of the school(s) in continuous improvement processes.
- Identify the status of the district regarding the balance of roles and how the balance might be appropriately aligned.

Section One: The Importance of a District-led Continuous Improvement Process

A strong centralized approach to continuous improvement that allows for broad input into the work has the potential to leverage both the strength of a well-focused leadership structure and the collective wisdom from all parts of the organization. This approach has the highest potential to maximize the district's investment into the process.

Having a district-led approach impacts all areas of the continuous improvement cycle. A decentralized approach without centralized leadership can lead to several unintended consequences, including an incomplete data picture, uncoordinated selection and implementation of strategies and activities, inadequate allocation of resources, and inconsistent monitoring practices. These unintended consequences can result in an inability of schools to realize the full potential of the strategies they are implementing and a loss of stakeholder efficacy and engagement. While several things can be done to address this issue, one of the most important is having a consistent district-led continuous improvement process.

As a district transitions to the Michigan Integrated Continuous Improvement Process, the intent is not so much to see the continuous improvement team as a combined district and school team; rather, it is to create a community of improvement composed of both school and district representatives. Once the continuous improvement plan is in place, it is primarily the role of the school to implement continuous learning cycles at the instructional level, and it is primarily the role of the district to support that instruction at the systems level as well as to fund the plan.

Activity 1

This activity will take approximately 20 – 30 minutes.

1. Distribute Handout 1. Review the introductory paragraph entitled The Importance of a District-led Continuous Improvement Process. What examples might the team identify where the identified unintended consequences occurred?
2. Review the learner outcomes. How might understanding these outcomes have helped avoid the unintended consequences?
3. Have each person identify a learner outcome that most resonates with them and share why they chose it.

Section 2: Shifting from a Culture of Isolation to a Culture of Collaboration

The rubric on the next page describes elements that might be part of a shift in culture from one of isolation, where the district and its schools operate independently when it comes to continuous improvement, to one of collaboration, where districts and schools operate in partnership with each other.

Activity 2

This activity will take approximately 20 -25 minutes. Depending on the size of your team, you may want to break into smaller groups and then compare results.

1. Distribute Handout 2. For each row, analyze the status of your district. Begin with the "Accomplished" column. To what extent does this column describe your district? If it does not, move one column to the left and consider that description. Keep moving left until you find a description that fits your district. What evidence can you cite to support this description?

2. What might your team consider doing to move to the right? Consider the following questions:

   • What causal theories might the team have regarding your current ratings?
   • What barriers exist to shifting the culture?
   • What actions might the team consider to begin the shift? To maintain the shift?

Shift from a Culture of Isolation to a Culture of Collaboration

Beginning (Individualistic)	Developing	Evolving	Accomplished (Collaborative)
Every school has its own vision, mission, and beliefs. District vision, mission, and beliefs are not visible in buildings and do not impact work.	District vision, mission, and beliefs are visible at the district and building levels but are not understood by stakeholders and do not impact work.	District vision, mission, and beliefs are visible and can be articulated by district-wide stakeholders who can also articulate how they impact district work.	District vision, mission, and beliefs are visible and intentional and can be articulated by district-wide stakeholders who can also articulate how they drive district work. District-wide data is collected regarding the impact of district vision, mission, and beliefs.
District policies and structures do not support growth of a collaborative culture.	Policies and structures reference collaboration but are not clear regarding the role of individuals within the group.	Policies and structures outline the role of individuals but there is a lack of clarity regarding expectations/accountability.	Policy and structures clearly outline the role of individuals, clear expectations for accountability to the group, and accountability from the group to the individuals.
District collaborative routines are disjointed or non-existent.	Collaborative routines are vague.	Collaborative routines are spelled out but roles within those routines are unclear.	Collaborative routines are well-defined and part of the district culture.
District leaders have not taken the opportunity to engage school leaders in collaborative goal setting.	District leaders have promised to engage school leaders in collaborative goal-setting but a clear process has not been identified.	District leaders have identified a process for collaborative goal-setting with school leaders, and conversations have begun.	District leaders have led a strong collaborative effort to establish goals, and school leaders feel their input has been clearly heard.
Schools develop plans and the district simply combines all school plans to build the district portfolio.	Schools and the district develop plans independently of each other, and they are entered in the portfolio as isolated entities.	Continuous improvement plans are developed separately by the district and the schools but are combined in the development of the final plan.	Continuous improvement plans are collaboratively developed by a team that has both district and school perspectives.
Stakeholders who make decisions consider only a single perspective.	Stakeholders who make decisions consider a variety of perspectives, but the culture still favors a single perspective.	Stakeholders who make decisions consider a variety of perspectives and all perspectives are considered in the final decision.	Decisions-makers with varied perspectives are specifically invited and welcomed to the team, and decisions represent a consensus of the various perspectives.

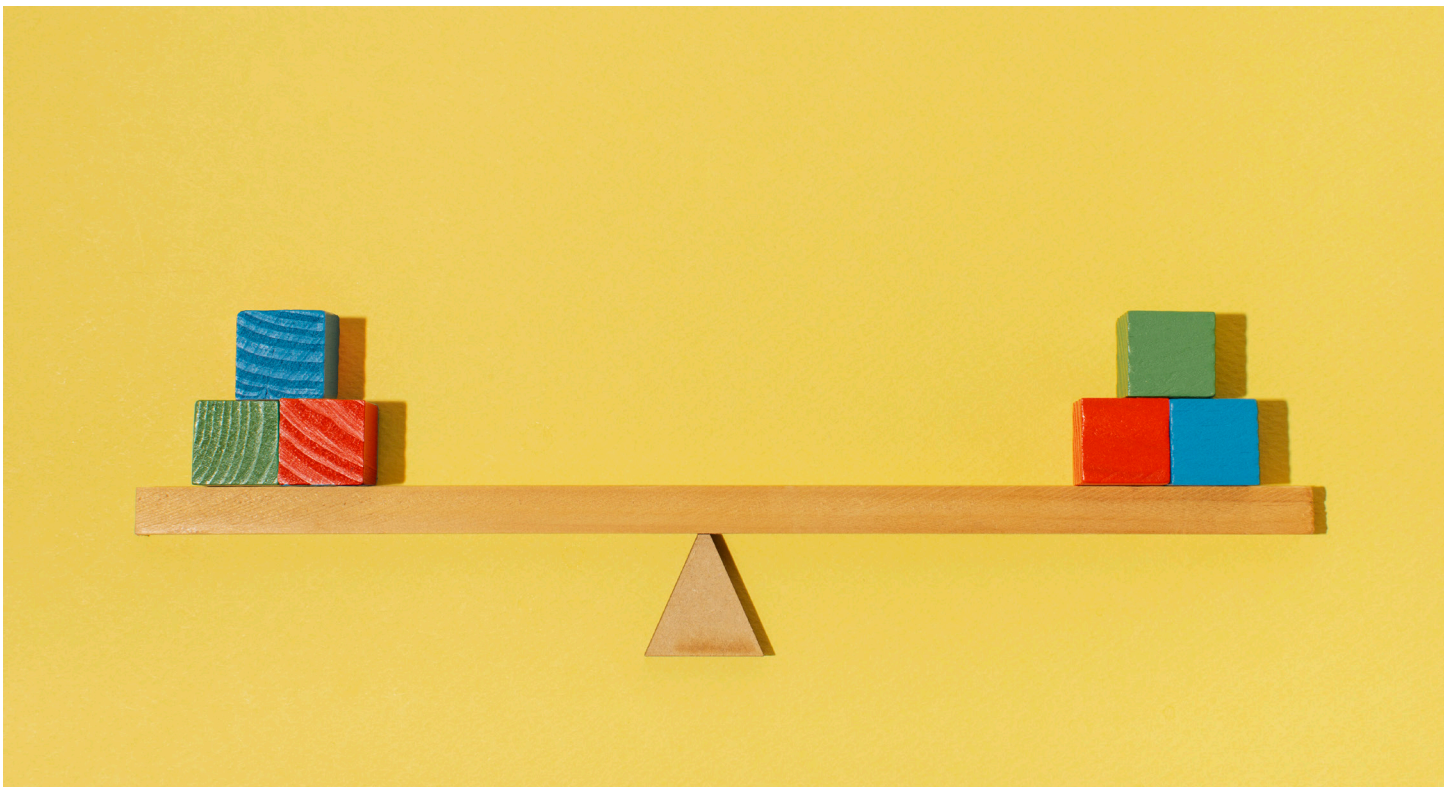# Section 3: Maintaining Balance in the Continuous Improvement Process

While it is primarily the role of the school to implement continuous learning cycles at the instructional level, it is primarily the role of the district to support that instruction at the systems level, whether that be with systems that have a more direct impact on student learning such as curriculum/ instruction/ assessment, data, student support, or technology, or those that support education more generally, including leadership, communication, human resources, finance, transportation, or food service. It is also ultimately the responsibility of the district to ensure that the plan is funded. While MICIP is coordinated at the district level by the district continuous improvement team, it is also appropriate for schools to have teams to monitor the plan's implementation and impact.

Activity 3

This activity will take approximately 45 minutes. Depending on the size of your team, you may want to break into smaller groups and then compare results.

1. Distribute Handout 3. Consider the following questions:
    *   What function, roles and responsibilities do **buildings** have?
    *   What functions, roles and responsibilities do **districts** have?
    *   What functions, roles and responsibilities are held in common?

2. Building teams: Utilize the **Maintaining Balance Building Action Planning template** to identify what building continuous improvement functions are in place and which might need to be created or strengthened. Submit completed template(s) to the district team.

    District team: Review the completed Maintaining Balance building-level action planning templates and then complete the **Maintaining Balance District Action Planning template**.

Maintaining Balance in the Continuous Improvement Process

Building Team Functions	Collaborative Function	District Team Functions
Identify the building continuous improvement team process and membership to support the district continuous improvement team. Choose representatives for the building-level continuous improvement team, including building leadership and a variety of instructional/ non-instructional staff.	Build a continuous improvement team composed of district, school, and community representatives. • Ensure appropriate team knowledge and skills. • Identify processes and procedures for how the continuous improvement process will work to reflect the needs of the district. • Identify the needs of individual schools. • Clarify what decisions are made by the district continuous improvement team and what decisions are made by the building teams.	Choose members for the continuous improvement team to represent district leadership and systems. Identify one key leader with ability and authority to make executive level decisions. Identify team members from the board and the community.
Identify needs/assets and root cause at the building level based on data. Report to the district continuous improvement team.	Review needs/assets across the district, looking at both district and school-level data. Identify root cause based on district wide as well as individual school factors.	Identify needs/assets at the district level based on district data. Consider the role of systems as part of the root cause process.
Identify and understand what goals apply to the building and what building end/interim targets support continuous improvement plan targets.	Identify strategies and activities to implement district goals, including building/enhancing necessary support systems. Identify equity of funding.	Identify processes to implement systems to support district goals. Identify funding streams for district goals.
Implement strategies to address building-based barriers.	Identify barriers to plan implementation; identify strategies to address barriers.	Implement district strategies to address barriers.
Identify and implement communication processes and procedures within the building and to the district continuous improvement team.	Identify communication processes and procedures from the district communication team to various stakeholders.	Identify and implement communication processes and procedures to identified stakeholders.

Building Team Functions	Collaborative Function	District Team Functions
Collect building-based strategy implementation and impact monitoring data. Make meaning of data; bring recommendations of how to address data to the district continuous improvement team.	Collect strategy implementation and impact monitoring data from across the district. Make meaning of data district-wide; identify adjustments to plan at either the district or building level, if needed. Evaluate goals based on district-wide and building data. District leadership and school teams are fully accountable to each other and share responsibility for plan implementation.	Ensure systems are in place to support collection of strategy implementation data and impact data.

Facilitator Readiness

To successfully utilize this toolkit in support of a district, it would be helpful if facilitators would be familiar with the following content. See the MICIP website for additional professional learning on these topics.

MICIP Mindset:

- Ongoing improvement cycles that are collaborative and district-driven.
- Whole Child needs addressed and supported by the Whole School and the Whole Community (WSCC).
- Systems developed, implemented, and monitored to support implementation of the entire plan.
- Equity in opportunities, environments, and supports.

Additional Considerations for Support

Complementary System-Level Elements Important to Maintaining a Collaborative Process: See additional MICIP Toolkits.

Optional Reading to Support Deeper Learning

- *Built to Last: The School Leader›s Guide for Sustaining Change while Managing Resistance*, Dr. Michael Murphy
- *Cage Busting Leadership*, Frederick Hess (Focus: Strategic Abandonment Tool)
- *Leading with Focus: Evaluating the Essentials for District and School Improvement*, Mike Schmoker
- *Mindset*, Carol Dweck

Acknowledgements

This toolkit was designed by the Michigan Continuous Systems Improvement (MI-CSI) Team, with layout done by Christi Lopez, MDE. Questions about the toolkit can be directed to mde-micip@michigan.gov.