



# The Stages of School Development

AS WE BEGAN RESEARCHING SCHOOLS THAT WERE MAKING SIGNIFICANT improvements in student achievement, we spent months talking to principals, teachers, parents, and students about their practices. We visited classrooms, teacher team meetings, community forums, and student assemblies. Our plan was to focus on current practices at each school, looking for effective strategies in use that we could recommend to all our principals. We also asked a lot of questions about their history. What was the school like when you first arrived? What were the first changes you made? What worked and what didn't work? From these questions we built case studies of a number of schools, summarizing their improvement stories, with the assumption that these would be an effective teaching tool for our aspiring principals.

As we began to review the cases as a group, we realized to our surprise that there were consistent patterns these principals and schools had experienced in their improvement journeys. Although no two schools were exactly alike in their progression over time, the sequence of action steps and improvements each school took was much more consistent across successful schools than we had expected. This insight led us to recognize the importance of thinking about school improvement in terms of stages of school development. Just as a child learning to read must be taught skills sequentially and in predictable stages, school development requires multiple, predictable steps enacted in a particular sequence. By tackling school priorities sequentially, these highly effective principals were able to deliver continuous, measurable improvements in student learning.

At the same time, just as a child will struggle if asked to read *Goodnight Moon* before understanding the relationships between letters and sounds, schools struggle if leaders jump ahead to implement higher-order practices before foundational stage practices have been established. As one example, we visited one struggling school and sat in on an intensive professional development session focused on student differentiation in the classroom. Differentiation was a key priority for the school district, and the school leadership team had decided to invest significant dollars in a set of professional development sessions on the topic. However, as we observed multiple classrooms that day, we noted that many teachers lacked the core practices of effective lesson planning and there was no existing base of consistent and well-implemented instructional strategies for math or literacy instruction. These teachers didn't yet have solid content to differentiate their lessons around. They needed real help in developing stage 1 practices around instructional strategies as a first step to start their improvement journey.

Experiences like this made it clear that paying attention to the school's developmental stage is critical. Without a strategic focus on stages and sequence, principals and schools can feel as if they are on a treadmill, working hard but not seeing much progress. By contrast, implementing school actions in a developmentally logical sequence ensures key conditions are in place to allow you to continuously build on your progress. By getting results that are visible to both students and teachers, members of your school community will be inspired to keep striving to do better.

This chapter provides an overview of what each stage of the Transformational Leadership Framework (TLF) looks like in practice. In the next chapter, we show you how to use the TLF to diagnose your school's current developmental stages by examining what framework actions your school is implementing consistently. The rest of the book then helps you learn more about how to do this work within each category.

## OVERVIEW OF STAGES

The TLF provides a clear starting point and helps you map the trajectory of change in your school by breaking each action in the TLF into stages of development. In this way the TLF can serve as an ongoing guide to help you diagnose the current state of your school and continually make improvements that lead to reaching and sustaining high levels of student achievement.

Before we explain how to use the TLF to improve your school, we introduce you to the structure of the framework and explain how to read the pieces of the TLF that you will encounter throughout the book. Table 1.1 offers a sample TLF table for planning and operations. This table breaks down a set of actions within one broader principal practice, or lever.

**Table 1.1** Sample TLF Table for Planning and Operations for Lever 3, Budget, and Action 1, Budget and Resources

	PRINCIPAL ACTIONS	SCHOOL ACTION
<b>Stage 1</b>	Conduct a comprehensive review of all current resources (financial, staff, in-kind, supplemental, external partners/programs/resources) and, wherever possible, shift existing resources to align to strategic priorities. Identify key partners in the school and the system to support the budgeting process.	School resources are reallocated to support strategic priorities.
<b>Stage 2</b>	Forecast new resources and materials needed two to three years out based on the strategic plan (e.g., robust classroom libraries to increase literacy skills of students) and begin purchasing and planning for these needs.	Staff forecast resources they will need, accounting for materials they can reuse, to support strategic priorities.
<b>Stage 3</b>	Effectively leverage all potential resource sources through an ongoing, active approach to budget and resource management.	New resources and external partnerships are adequate to fund professional development and student intervention time and skills.

As you can see from table 1.1, within each category and lever of the TLF, each major action is divided into three stages: 1, 2 and 3. Stage 1 actions are the initial practices that schools put in place to jump-start improvements, stage 2 actions enable schools to address the needs of different groups of students, and stage 3 actions are higher-order practices that we found in consistently high-performing schools.

We've identified two component parts in each stage:

- Principal actions: Steps the principal can take to drive consistent implementation of changes in the school
- School actions: Consistent and observable behaviors of staff and students

The principal actions provide the support that the wider staff community needs to put the school actions in place, leading in turn to improved student performance. In other words, if you find that your school is demonstrating stage 2 school actions in a particular lever and you want to focus on implementing stage 3 school actions as your next priority, you would look to the stage 3 principal actions as your guide for specific steps you can take that will provide a foundation for successful implementation of stage 3 school actions.

It is important to keep in mind that a good diagnosis of school actions will likely reveal variation within categories. For example, within the category of learning and teaching, you might find your practices around the “using data” lever are currently in stage 2, but you might still be at stage 1 when it comes to creating a pyramid of academic interventions. You and your staff will find your unique path through the TLF based on the distinctive needs of your school. The TLF does not prescribe the same path and actions in the same sequence to every school; rather, it offers a process to guide you through the work of improving your school.

## How the Stages of the TLF Work

In this section, we provide general definitions of each stage of development within the TLF, as found within the school culture, learning and teaching, talent management, and planning and operations categories, along with the key levers within each of those categories. (Personal leadership is not broken into stages because effective leaders demonstrate these actions regardless of the current state of their school.) You will not find stage 0 actions described in the TLF, but we use the term *stage 0* to describe the absence of any of the actions present in the other stages. Schools without any stage 1, 2, or 3 actions tend to be very low-performing schools that have often experienced multiple changes in leadership in a short period, leading to instability in implementation of school actions and the absence of consistent schoolwide systems and structures.

### Stage 1

In schools in stage 1 for any particular lever, principals develop and introduce basic systems and structures to support school improvement goals and spend significant time monitoring and reinforcing the transition to these systems. These foundational systems and structures enable the school to move from being unfocused and even chaotic to having clear expectations and staff practices across the school. Here are examples of stage 1 principal actions from each category:

- *Learning and teaching:* Model effective approaches to unit planning and regularly review unit plans to provide teacher teams with feedback on their plans.
- *School culture:* Work collaboratively with staff to develop a short list of student behavioral expectations and staff responses that staff members implement consistently.
- *Talent management:* Define the roles and responsibilities for the instructional leadership team, including supporting and leading teacher team meetings, leading data-driven instruction cycles, conducting teacher observations, providing feedback, and completing final evaluations.

- *Planning and operations:* Conduct a comprehensive review of all current resources (financial, staff, external partnerships, use of time) and shift existing resources to align with strategic priorities.

## **Stage 2**

In stage 2, the school leader develops staff capacity to take on leadership roles across the TLF categories, building a high-functioning instructional leadership team with strong teacher leaders. Stage 2 actions meet the needs of individual students more effectively than stage 1 practices do. These sample principal actions illustrate what the practices listed under stage 1 above look like when they advance to stage 2:

- *Learning and teaching:* Develop the capacity of the instructional leadership team to review unit and lesson plans to ensure alignment and rigor.
- *School culture:* Establish age- and developmentally appropriate behavioral expectations, and create structures to implement frequent teaching and reinforcement of those behaviors.
- *Talent management:* Design year-long professional learning for the instructional leadership team members to ensure consistency in their assessment of teacher practice and build the capacity of instructional leadership team members to conduct observations and provide effective feedback.
- *Planning and operations:* Forecast new resources and materials needed two to three years in the future based on the strategic plan, and begin purchasing and planning for those needs.

## **Stage 3**

In stage 3, the principal has developed systems that foster a deep sense of ownership for key actions across staff, students, and families. Because nearly every member of the school community is invested in these practices and has the capacity to implement them consistently, the school is able to sustain high levels of student outcomes even during staff or leadership transitions. The school has a clear pipeline denoting which staff members will take on future tasks and who, outside of the principal, will take on leadership roles. These sample principal actions show what the practices listed under stage 2 look like when they move to stage 3:

- *Learning and teaching:* Lead the annual review process in which staff collaborate to assess the alignment and quality of curriculum plans and materials.
- *School culture:* Build student capacity to teach school values and behaviors to peers and hold each other accountable for living them.

- *Talent management*: Build systems for distributed leadership through which members of the instructional leadership team manage specific initiatives and grade-level teams or departments.
- *Planning and operations*: Effectively leverage all potential resource sources through an ongoing, active approach to budget and resource management.

## Moving through the Stages

To illustrate how a school moves through the stages of a particular action within the TLE, we give you the story of one school whose staff made sequential changes to their practices around behavioral expectations, following the stages of the framework, and, over time, saw improvement in student behavior and academic performance. We provide vignettes like this one throughout the book.



### **CREATING A CULTURE OF LEARNING: MOVING FROM STAGE 1 TO STAGE 3 FOR BEHAVIORAL EXPECTATIONS**

*Leadership Public Schools, Richmond, California*

When Shawn Benjamin became principal of LPS Richmond, she faced a daunting challenge. A charter network high school located in the high-poverty city of Richmond in Northern California, LPS was surrounded by a neighborhood where violence was endemic and drive-by shootings were all too common.

Benjamin arrived to find that the culture of the neighborhood carried into the school itself, with few systems in place to support student safety or learning. The school had had five principals in four years, leaving parents angry about the instability and poor educational quality their children were experiencing. At the time, only 21 percent of students met proficiency benchmarks in English, and math results were even more abysmal, with just 5 percent of students performing at grade level. About one-third of the students arrived late to school each day.

"In the beginning, we tried so many different things," Benjamin said. "I would hand out hot chocolate to kids who came on time; we held raffles for those kids. . . . That was my job eight years ago." As she has led her school through the stages of development around behavioral expectations, however, her job has transformed. "Now I am developing a culture of learning," she said. "Rather than telling kids, 'Don't fight in class,' now we are saying, 'If you are struggling with an issue, if you are confused in class, you need to take action, to make an

appointment to see your teacher.’ We are connecting everything to what it means to be ready for college. My work is about what are the specific behaviors students are going to need in college and how do we create that environment.”

How did Benjamin and her staff get to the place they are in today? During her first year at Richmond, as she reviewed school conditions to identify her top priorities for changes that year, Benjamin saw that the school lacked a clear and consistent system for managing behavioral expectations across the school. She knew from her New Leaders training that establishing those expectations was a precondition to academic success; without them, behavior issues would continue to disrupt teaching and learning. She knew that this issue needed to be addressed immediately so that teachers and students could focus on academic priorities.

Benjamin developed a plan to establish consistently high behavioral expectations for students. Since this was a major culture shift for the school, she and her team tackled the work in a disciplined way, working step-by-step and building on a foundation of strong practices as she moved through the key development stages outlined in table 1.2.

Benjamin and the school’s dean of students began by creating a comprehensive schoolwide discipline system that set clear expectations for student and staff behavior on attendance, tardiness, school cleanliness, and classroom performance, a stage 1 action for behavioral expectations. As part of that system, she looked at the way the physical space was organized (a stage 2 action in the lever on facilities in planning and operations) and discovered areas of the school that were unsupervised where students frequently had altercations. So she changed the ways students moved through the building, making sure that adults were on site or within earshot anywhere students passed through the halls.

She and her staff designed a tiered behavior support plan that addressed rule violations and had four levels of intervention involving teachers, advisors, family members, and, for the final tier, the principal. Like many behavior systems found in high schools, Benjamin’s approach had staff members problem solving with students, working together to correct inappropriate behavior, creating contracts and time lines for addressing challenges, and establishing regular check-ins to ensure things remained on track. That first year, they also created rewards for good behavior. If Benjamin and the dean found that students behaved well over the course of each week, they would give students a dress-code-free Friday.

Benjamin made it clear to students and families that she and the staff took the new discipline program seriously. In her first year as principal, 25 percent of students were suspended, up from 5 percent the year before. After that,

**Table 1.2** Behavioral Expectations

	PRINCIPAL ACTIONS	SCHOOL ACTIONS
<b>Stage 1</b>	<p>Describe how staff and students can enact the vision and mission through specific behaviors.</p> <p>Articulate and model the importance of social-emotional and social responsibility skills and their connections to student success in school, college, and life.</p> <p>Build a school-level system of rewards and consequences that result from specific behaviors.</p> <p>Create an accountability system so that all infractions are addressed in a consistent manner, and hold staff responsible for consistently implementing rewards and consequences with all students, not only those they directly teach.</p> <p>Ensure that adults know how behavioral expectations translate to all parts of the school day, including opening of day, lunchtime, and class transitions.</p>	<p>There are multiple formal structures through which school values and expected behaviors are taught and reinforced; daily rewards and consequences are published and shared widely.</p> <p>Student social-emotional and social responsibility skills are included and explicitly named in the expectations of behavior.</p> <p>All members of the school community use common language to describe the school values, and they share a common understanding of expected behaviors.</p> <p>Rituals and public forums celebrate students who model expectations and demonstrate behaviors that reflect the values.</p> <p>All staff are taught and reinforce behavioral expectations while implementing the system of rewards and consequences.</p>
<b>Stage 2</b>	<p>Establish appropriate behavioral expectations for age and developmental stage.</p> <p>Create structures to implement frequent teaching and reteaching of behaviors.</p> <p>Expose staff continually to grade- and age-appropriate behaviors and supports.</p> <p>Use multiple forms of student data, including disaggregated discipline data, attendance, participation in activities, and who is publicly celebrated, to monitor and measure adoption of behaviors.</p> <p>Create structures and opportunities for students to teach other students and serve as role models.</p> <p>Develop the school's capacity to respond to students' behavioral and social-emotional needs in developmentally appropriate ways.</p>	<p>Induction systems are in place for new and returning staff, students, families, and communities.</p> <p>Adults use teachable moments and find time to reinforce and teach behaviors.</p> <p>Students who live the behaviors are given additional freedoms and demonstrate high levels of personal responsibility in social and academic settings.</p> <p>Staff consistently implement the discipline system and reinforce the established behavioral expectations.</p> <p>Social responsibility skills (service to others) are taught to all students.</p> <p>Systems are in place to review the number of referrals and analyze them to identify patterns or trends in referral data.</p> <p>Disaggregated referral data are regularly reviewed to ensure that consequences are not meted out differently based on race, class, or ethnicity.</p>



**Table 1.2** *(continued)*

	PRINCIPAL ACTIONS	SCHOOL ACTIONS
<b>Stage 3</b>	Build student capacity and experience in teaching the values and behaviors to others and for holding one another accountable for living them.  Implement structures for peer mediation where students serve as role models for one another.	Students have a clear and consistent role in teaching behaviors to new and younger students.  Students energize their peers and focus on achievement.  Students hold one another accountable for living by the expectations for student behavior.  Students mediate moments of conflict within the school.

however, the number of suspensions fell, reaching 16 percent of students by her fifth year.

Benjamin's and her staff's work around behavior has changed as the school evolves. First, with behavioral policies codified, known by all, and regularly enforced (stage 1 practices) during Benjamin's first year, the staff began to implement stage 2 actions of identifying and celebrating students who stood out as role models and exemplars. She went into the school wanting to make it "cool to be smart" so that students were motivated to do their best and persist through challenges. Also in her first year, the staff created competitions building from the Jeff Howard model of "work hard, get smart."<sup>1</sup> The school held competitions among advisory groups and grade levels, offering incentives such as a dress-code-free day or a grade-level celebration. These are stage 2 and 3 actions for behavioral expectations. The students "like[d] feeling smart" and they liked to "stand out," Benjamin said.

As important changes to the school culture took root in her first year, Benjamin doubled down on her focus on improving instruction. She had found that the general rigor of classes was low and most instruction consisted of teachers lecturing to students. Therefore, in her second year, she focused professional development for teachers on strategies for increasing student dialogue and engagement in the classroom. By Benjamin's fourth year at the school, the passing rate for tenth graders on the state English language arts (ELA) test had jumped to 89 percent and to 92 percent for math; two years after that, ELA and math proficiency continued to rise, to 94 percent and 96 percent, respectively, and 98 percent of students went on to college. "The new systems have fostered a sense of pride in students' ability to follow through, and there is a real commitment that no one will fall through the cracks," Benjamin said.

Having made so much progress around setting and implementing behavioral expectations, Benjamin and her staff in her third year were also able to put in

place the stage 3 action of building students' capacity to teach values and behaviors to their peers and hold one another accountable for living them. Through an application process, juniors and seniors became peer leaders, responsible for running two orientations and attending a retreat for incoming freshmen before school started. At these events, the older students explained school policies and expectations. Not only did ninth graders come in to Richmond knowing what was expected of them, but the peer leaders were respected throughout the school, Benjamin said: "They shaped what other kids wanted to be like." To take student leadership development even further, in Benjamin's sixth year, one of her teachers created a class for peer leaders in which they learn leadership theory and training. At that point, peer leaders took responsibility for running weekly family meetings.

Two years later, Benjamin and her staff created a student ambassador role for older students as part of the school's home visit program intended to inform families about the school's college-bound culture. Each spring, the ambassadors accompany an adult school staff member on visits to the homes of eighth graders who will be attending Richmond the following fall. In those visits, the students talk about school expectations, trade stories about middle school, and discuss their own experiences at Richmond.

In Benjamin's eighth year as principal, only 4 percent of students were suspended, none of them freshmen. With that success, she and her team have created another structure for peer mediation, a stage 3 action: "I want us to move from telling students, 'If you do something wrong, you get in trouble with the dean,' to having students realize, 'I am a part of this greater community and I want to make the right choices because I feel committed to this community and my actions impact others.'" To do this, the school has created an honor council made up of students who apply for the position. The council will address low-level behavioral violations. Explained Benjamin, when students are sent to the dean, the matter is handled privately. Her hope is that by requiring students to explain their actions, or "poor choices," to a panel of their peers, they will feel more accountable to their community. "It's about the small choices you make," she said. "We have such a strong sense of identity and community, it felt like the perfect next step."

You can find more on how to move through the different stages of school culture in chapter 4.

Table 1.3 outlines the TLF practices Benjamin put in place, the data she used to identify her priorities, and the next steps she and her staff could take based on the sequence of actions in the framework.

**Table 1.3** TLF Analysis of LPS Richmond

TLF ACTION	ARTIFACTS	EVIDENCE	TLF STAGE	PRINCIPAL ACTIONS TO MOVE TO NEXT STAGE	SCHOOL ACTIONS
Culture, behavioral expectations	Classroom observations; review of discipline reports; conversations with teachers	Disciplinary incidents high. Behavioral expectations not clear; incidents handled differently from classroom to classroom. Fractured relationships between students and staff.	Stage 0	Created an accountability system that set clear expectations for students and staff on attendance, tardiness, school cleanliness, and classroom performance so that all infractions were addressed in a consistent manner. Created a pyramid of interventions.	Student social-emotional and social responsibility skills are included and explicitly named in the expectations of behavior. Rituals and public forums celebrate students who model expectations and demonstrate behaviors that reflect school values.
		Over time, expectations are implemented consistently, with staff problem solving with students to correct inappropriate behavior and creating contracts and time lines for addressing challenges and regular check-ins to make sure things remain on track.	Stage 2	Implemented structures for peer mediation	Seniors took on the role of mentoring freshmen to help them acclimate to the school culture, meeting with them twice a week, and supporting them in developing their goals for the year.
	Course syllabus; Classroom observations	Teacher develops course for students to learn leadership theory and skills; students apply for and enroll in course	Stage 3	Work with teachers to continue to create leadership and peer mentor opportunities for students.	Hoping to make students feel more accountable to one another; the school created a student-run honor council to address low-level behavioral violations.

## PUTTING THE FRAMEWORK TO WORK

As the work at LPS Richmond suggests, principals can use the framework to identify what school actions are evident in their school within each key lever of the TLF. After observing classrooms and talking with teachers and students, Benjamin quickly identified that her school lacked consistent expectations for student behavior. While LPS Richmond reached stage 3 for actions around behavior within the school culture category in its first year of making changes to principal and school actions, many actions in learning and teaching had not yet reached stage 1. Benjamin therefore chose to focus heavily on those lagging instructional practices in her second year.

Now that you have seen how the stages work and how you can use them to guide your own school improvement efforts, you are ready to move on to diagnosis and action planning. The next chapter is your gateway to making sense of and getting the most out of the TLF. It is there that we show you how the framework works as a tool for assessing and improving every aspect of your school.