

The power of committing to an instructional priority



For educators there's always too much to do, so many balls to keep in the air. But when it comes to fostering instructional change, choosing just one or two priorities to focus on can make a huge difference.

The clarity, alignment, and cohesion created when schools commit to just one or two instructional priorities can result in powerful teaching and learning—and results for students. In *Pathways to the Common Core*, Lucy Calkins tells us that innovations implemented with low or even medium levels of fidelity have **no effect** on achievement, while those implemented with 90% fidelity can have an extremely high impact. The ability to focus is literally the difference between success and failure.

And our odds of success are increased when we narrow our focus with concrete, observable measures. A priority as broad as “text-dependent questions” doesn't offer a clear picture of what we want to see in planning and instruction. But if we transform the priority into something concrete and observable such as, “Teachers ask text-dependent questions that address challenging areas of the text, and scaffold students toward key understandings, leading to discussion and student writing,” things become much clearer. Now we know what we're aiming for when we step into the classroom.

Use the instructional practice guides and related resources to create a plan to set and pursue an instructional priority at your school.

1

INSTRUCTIONAL PRACTICE GUIDES

Use these [guides](#) from Achieve The Core to help you determine an instructional priority. Informed by the key shifts of the Common Core, these guides are designed to support teacher development and can be used by teachers and coaches to inform and improve planning and instruction. The concrete and observable indicators of effective, Common Core-aligned teaching included in these guides help teachers and leaders align on what they want to see in planning and instruction—that way, everyone is on the same page as they work to improve outcomes for students.

2

VIDEO

Watch this [video](#) to hear how Patrick Love, the principal at Alain Locke Charter School in Chicago, IL, thinks about setting and working towards a school-wide instructional priority around instructional strategies and analyzing writing for actionable trends.

3

SWITCH

When we're faced with massive change, it's easy to feel overwhelmed. In order for teachers and leaders to feel successful as they work towards an instructional priority, they need attainable milestones along the way.

The book *Switch* explains how to “shrink the change” with bite-sized goals that together, and over time, result in powerful change.

Read this book on your own or with your team to build your own knowledge and inform your school's plan around setting and pursuing an instructional priority.

LEADER TIP:

Student achievement data, student work, and observations of teacher practice should help you determine your instructional priority

LEADER TIP:

Think about the “arc” of your priority, and set milestones. What will your priority look like at the beginning of the year, the end of the year, and each month in between?