

# Theory of Action; Samples from States and Districts

## Intent

A theory of action is a connected set of propositions, a logical chain of reasoning that explains how change will lead to improved practices. It “connects the dots” explaining in a commonsense way which features are expected to produce results that lead to the final desired outcome (Haertel, National Academy of Science, 2009)

## Examples

### San Francisco Unified School District

If we . . .

- Engage students to learn a rigorous standards-based curriculum
- Invest in the professional learning of teachers, leaders and school staff
- Enlist our partners and engage families in a community schools approach
- Align school and central office supports and resources to our Six Strategies for Success

Then every student who enrolls in our schools will graduate ready for college, career and life

### LA Unified School District

If we . . .

- Transform human capital by ensuring there are effective employees at every level of the organization focused on improving student outcomes;
- Give our students and parents a portfolio of high-quality school choice;
- Hold ourselves accountable through strong performance management;

Then we will keep our promise to graduate every student in our schools college-prepared and career-ready

### Massachusetts

If we engage in continuous improvement (set high standards, evaluate based on those standards, collect evaluation information, and provide support based on that data) THEN all educators will become more effective, all students will have more equitable access to great educators, AND student outcomes will improve

### California

The California Way rests on the belief that educators want to excel, trusts them to improve when given the proper supports, and provides local schools and districts with the leeway and flexibility to deploy resources so they can improve

### US (under the administration of the previous Secretary of Education)

If we offer states the chance to get out from under the AYP requirements of NCLB and offer financial incentives for them -- in return for states' agreement to adopt common standards (that are fewer, clearer, and higher) and assessments and link educator evaluation to student results -- then states will migrate toward the money and will voluntarily reform in ways that lead to improved student performance

### NYS (loosely based on state equity plan)

IF schools/districts use multiple measures of effectiveness (that include observation and contribution to student growth) to identify educators who are highly-effective and those who need more support AND IF the high-quality professional development that is provided for educators is differentiated to address the individual needs of educators AND IF we make strategic staffing decisions to ensure equitable access to the most effective educators (that is, those students who need the most help are paired with those educators who are most effective) . . . THEN student achievement will improve

## Four Views of Accountability (source: Rivera, unpublished dissertation)

### **Performance model** Accountability via performance-based empowerment

There are learning targets and measurement tools. Deliver all students to the destination. Results are posted publicly. If you are unsuccessful, control is passed to others.

### **Bureaucratic model** Accountability via procedural due process

Rules rule. Effort is judged by whether established procedures are observed. It matters more that agreed-upon steps are taken than whether a student achieves a particular learning.

### **Market model** Accountability via responsiveness to consumer-demand

Customers know best. Parents dictate the content and form of schooling. Suppliers (schools) respond to demand (parents) or else exit the market.

### **Professional model** Accountability via expert judgment

Practitioners know best. Practitioners are responsible for making research-based decisions that are in the best interest of clients (students). Unlike craftsmen who guarantee results (e.g., pipes that don't leak or walls that stand) professionals are responsible for exercising judgment in a way that is consistent with the best research in the field.