

# Improving Early Grade Literacy

**An Improvement Resource for Educators**

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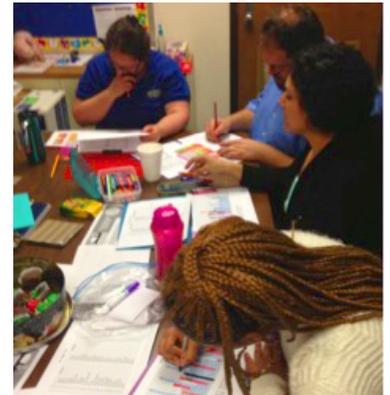
# Introduction

## Who we are

Improving Education is a nonprofit organization in Baltimore, Maryland committed to helping schools, parents, teachers, and leaders learn to improve. That includes designing, testing, and developing new ways to solve systemic problems through a rigorous quality improvement process. By being user-centered and focusing on high-leverage problems, we work quickly, learn fast, and rapidly prototype new ideas to improve instruction and student learning. Our approach allows us to be nimble, as we identify problems and refine improvements that can work across different contexts. We are systems thinkers, creative designers, and most of all persistent in our search for improvement.

## What we did

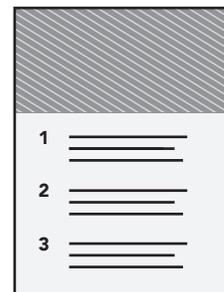
Over the past year and a half, we developed a Networked Improvement Community (NIC) approach that is working to increase reading achievement in Baltimore. Through this work, schools developed and tested protocols and materials for instruction and different ways of organizing their work to support student literacy growth. We'd like to thank the staff of Lakeland Elementary/Middle, Liberty Elementary, Cecil Elementary, and Maree G. Farring Elementary/Middle for their help in designing and testing the protocols in this packet. It is our hope that this document will support the work in other schools to improve early literacy and provide effective tools and protocols to make the work easier.



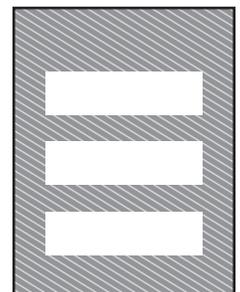
*A team hard at work*

## How to use this document

This document is organized to provide you with tools and protocols that can be used in schools and classrooms to support student literacy growth. We have included a brief primer on improvement science and some of the tools used to identify and organize the work. We have also provided examples of protocols and tools that we developed with teachers and schools. These have been tested in different schools, under different conditions, and have successfully supported student growth. While the protocols are provided, we encourage you to improve and refine them to work in your context. The document represents our best thinking at this moment, and we look forward to refining these in different contexts to support improved instruction and student learning.



**Instruction Sheet**

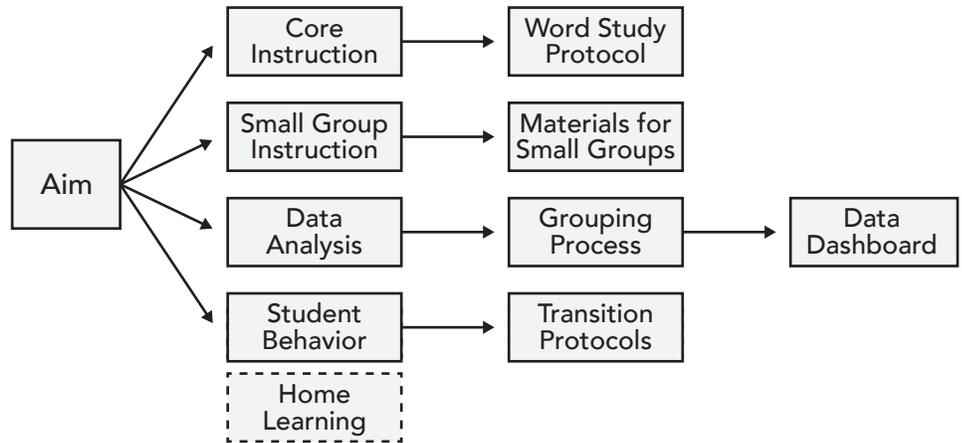


**Worksheet**

# Our process

## Aims & Drivers

Driver diagrams are valuable tools used to articulate the working theory of improvement and define change ideas that support key areas. The aim statement is specific and articulates what we are trying to improve, by when, and by how much. It is our "True North" and guides the work in schools.

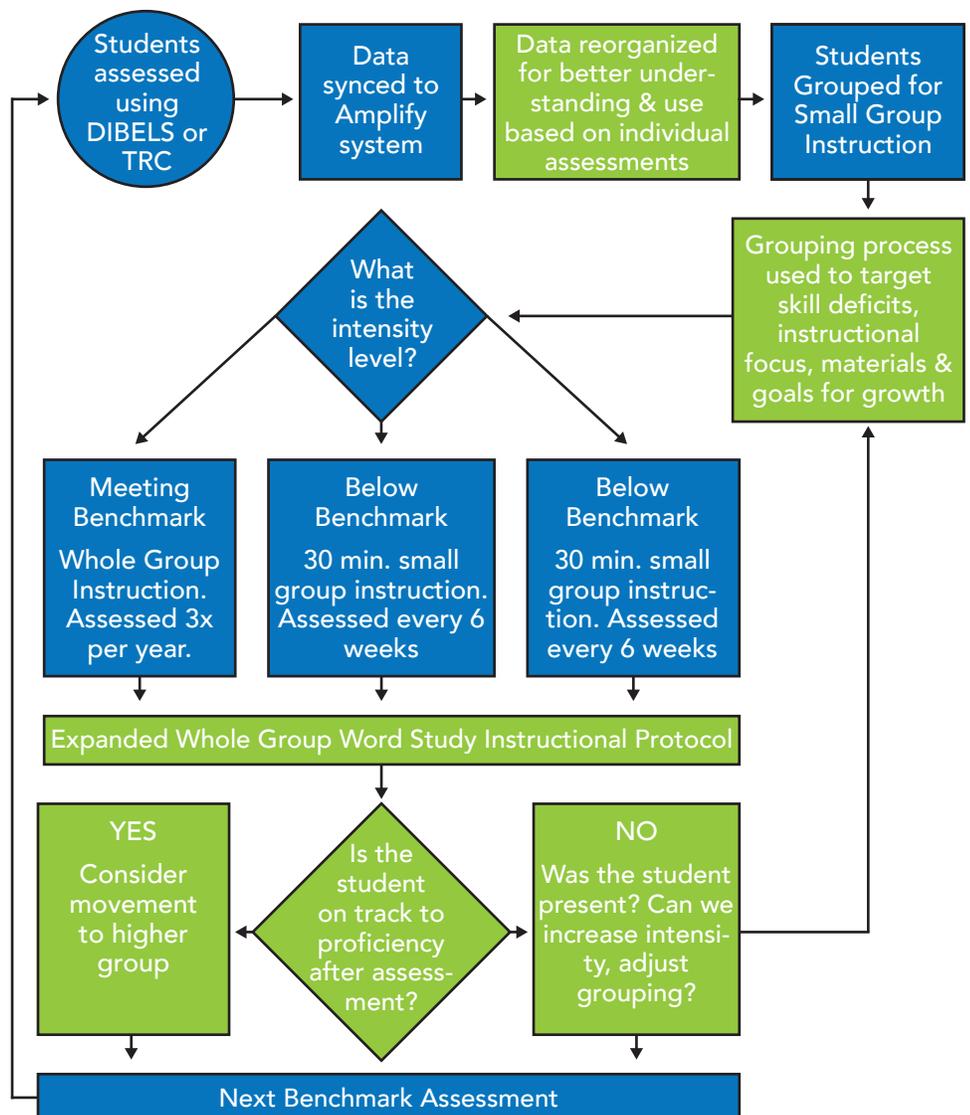


## Understand the Process

Process mapping is one of the best ways to illuminate a system and identify potential barriers and opportunities for improvement. This map follows the process of small group instruction in schools from the initial assessment through differentiated instruction and measuring progress. The blue shapes are steps we originally identified in the existing process, the green shapes identify areas where we developed and tested protocols to improve student learning. Those protocols are provided in this packet and can be used as you begin your improvement journey.

**Blue:** Existing components in each school.

**Green:** Components where time was spent refining and improving structures.



# Our process

## Plan-Do-Study-Act Cycles

- 1. Plan:** Plan out a test, predict the outcome, and identify methods for data collection.
- 2. Do:** Carry out this test on a small scale and then collect data.
- 3. Study:** Analyze the results and data.
- 4. Act:** Make changes based on what you learned. (Adapt, Adopt or Abandon)<sup>[1]</sup>

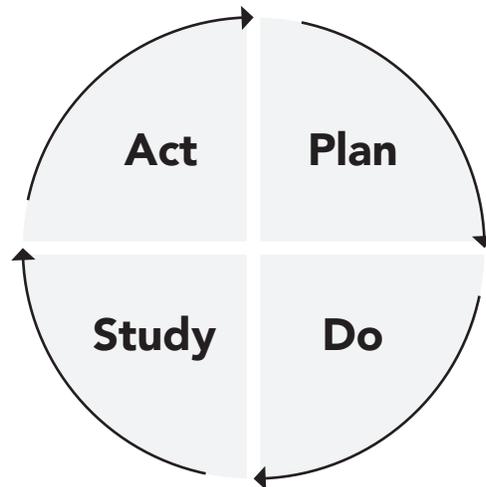


fig. 1<sup>[1]</sup>

## How We Improve

The Carnegie Foundation for the Advancement of Teaching identified 6 Core principles of improvement. The principles help to organize work, understand the system, measure progress, and spread learning to other locations. Each principle is critically important and although not linear, this acts as a guide to facilitate quality work in schools.<sup>[2]</sup>

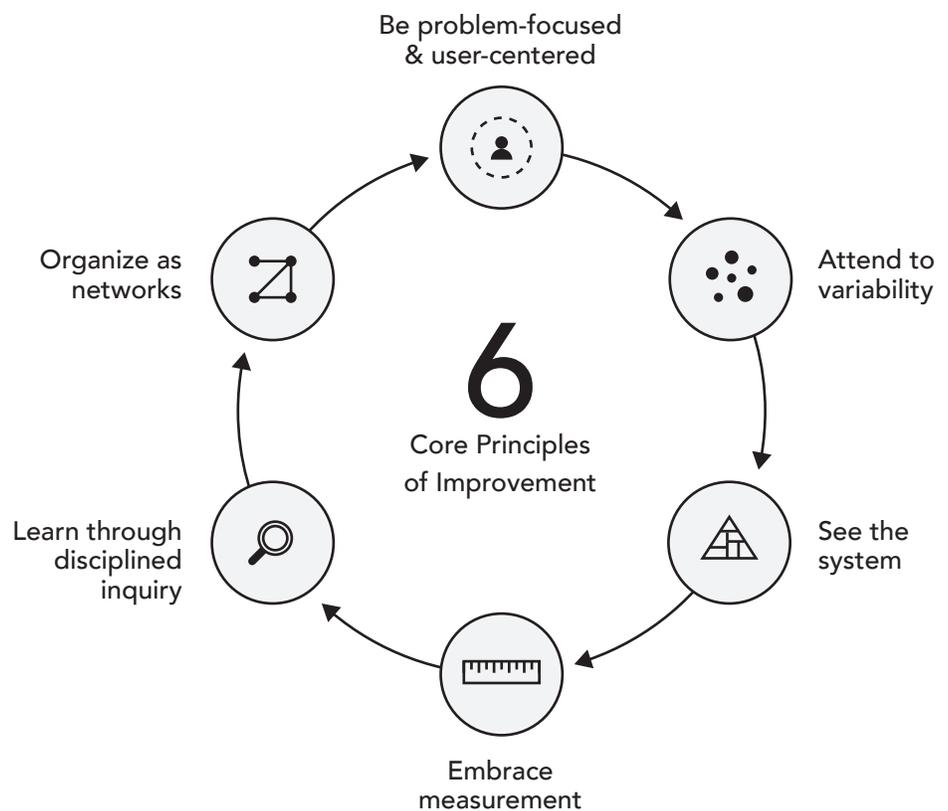


fig. 2<sup>[2]</sup>

# Regrouping Process

## 🕒 TIME

- 45 minutes

## 📦 MATERIALS

- Post-its & Sharpie
- Regrouping Mat Worksheet (printed large)
- Amplify Assessment Data

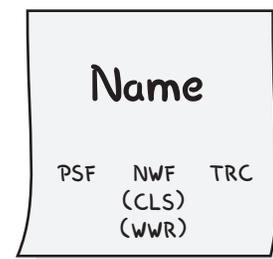
## 🚩 GOALS

- Analyze DIBELS and TRC data and group students in functional groups based on skill deficits.
- Identify instructional materials to use for each group of students that will accelerate progress in targeted areas.

## ① Label

Create a post-it note for each student.

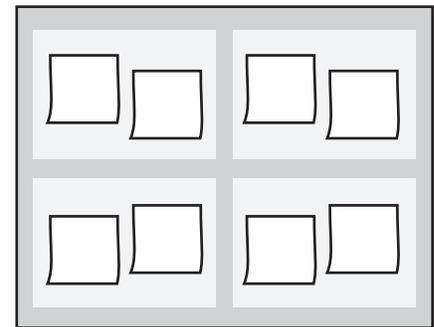
Include name, PSF, NWF (CLS and WWR), and TRC level.



## ② Cluster

Cluster your students around skill deficits, scores, and similar score patterns.

- Phonemic Awareness and Phonics (PSF Less than 35 and CLS Less than 20, and TRC less than D).
- Phonics (PSF Greater than 35, and CLS Less than 20, TRC less than D).
- Phonics Blending (PSF Greater than 35, CLS greater than 20 and WWR less than 5).
- Comprehension and Fluency (Green on all DIBELS, TRC below proficient E).
- Advanced (Proficient in each tested area): For classes with many high performing students, you may need to identify multiple groups.



*See Grouping Mat, p.4*

## ③ Rearrange

- Rearrange based on your knowledge of the student and how they might work best with other students.
- Identify a goal for each group. How much progress are you looking for in 3 weeks?

# Regrouping Process

## ④ Prepare

- Identify possible materials and instructional components for the next 3 weeks.
- How will you know that progress is being made?

## ⑤ Schedule

- Identify the schedule and when each group will be instructed for the next 3 weeks.

## ⑥ Plan Follow-Up

- Plan the follow-up assessments.
- Who will test each student, on what skill, by when?

*You can find the Regrouping Mat Worksheet on the next page.*

# PA + Phonics

## Beginning of Year Regrouping Mat

# Phonics

PSF < 35

CLS < 20

TRC < D

PSF > 35

CLS < 20

TRC < D



Place Post-Its



Place Post-Its

# Phonics Blending

PSF > 35

CLS > 20

WWR < 5

Green on all DIBELS

TRC below proficient E

# Comprehension + Fluency



Place Post-Its



Place Post-Its

# Word Study Protocol

## TIME

- 10-15 minutes each day for 5 days

## MATERIALS

- Foundations  
- Decodable text  
- Whiteboard + Markers  
- Grouping Worksheet

## AIM

- Increase student accuracy and fluency reading grade level text that will result in 90% of the students reading 23 words per minute on the middle-of-year benchmark assessment of DIBELS.



## Day 1

### Blending of words without the passage

- Teacher selects 8-10 words from the passage that the class will blend and read.
- Teacher does "can you hear the sounds activity" from 95% group.
- 2-3 sentences are identified from the passage and placed on the board.
- Students read the sentences (made up of many words they have just practiced).



## Day 2

### Blending and sentences from passage

- Review of words from the previous and any words that students may have struggled with from the sentences.
- Read the 2-3 sentences from yesterday and also introduce 2-3 more sentences that are read in the class.

### Introduce the text and highlight words

- Teacher passes out the text and students highlight the words they have been practicing on the paper.
- Students can practice reading sentences silently as they highlight.



## Day 3

### Reading the story

- Teacher reviews sounds from Foundations – Drill sounds warm up, review sight words and sentences.
- Teacher models partner reading to the students – for first paragraph or two.
- Teacher calls on a student set to choral read to model.

# Word Study Protocol

## **Students read to a partner**

Have the students pair up and read to a partner for the remainder of the time.

- Students have specific partners and spots in the room.
- Signal is given to move to their partner reading location.
- Teacher walks around the room and listens to partners reading to each other.



## **Day 4**

### **White board practice and comprehension**

- Dictation, 3 words and a sentence.
- Send highest performing group back to the seat to answer comprehension question independently.
- Remainder of the kids stay on the carpet, practice reading orally, and do the “Look back game” to find the answers to questions in the story.

### **Introduce the text and highlight words**

- Teacher passes out the text and students highlight the words they have been practicing on the paper.
- Students practice reading sentences silently as they highlight.



## **Day 5**

### **Dictation assessment from Foundations**

- Students complete the dictation assessment at their seats. As the teacher gives a word, the students write it.
- Spelling test.

*You can find the Grouping Worksheet on the next page.*

# Beginning of Year Grouping

Teacher:

Date:

## Instructional Focus: Phonemic Awareness & Phonics

Goal: PSF 40 NWF (CLS) 43

Student	Teacher	PSF	NWF (CLS)	NWF (WWR)	TRC

## Instructional Focus: Phonics (Individual Sounds)

Goal: NWF 43 (CLS)

Student	Teacher	PSF	NWF (CLS)	NWF (WWR)	TRC

# Beginning of Year Grouping

Teacher:

Date:

## Instructional Focus: Phonics Blending (1)

Goal: NWF 43 (CLS) 8 (WWR)

Student	Teacher	PSF	NWF (CLS)	NWF (WWR)	TRC

## Instructional Focus: Phonics Blending (2)

Goal: NWF 43 (CLS) 8 (WWR)

Student	Teacher	PSF	NWF (CLS)	NWF (WWR)	TRC

## Instructional Focus: Phonics Blending (2)

Goal: NWF 43 (CLS) 20 (WWR)

Student	Teacher	PSF	NWF (CLS)	NWF (WWR)	TRC

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## Acknowledgements

Our work would not be possible without the committed teachers and leaders in Baltimore City Public Schools. Special thanks to educators at Lakeland Elementary/Middle, Liberty Elementary, Cecil Elementary, and Maree G. Farring Elementary/Middle for their help in designing and testing the protocols in this packet and for their work to improve early literacy for children in Baltimore.

Additionally, we'd like to thank The Abell Foundation for investing in a new way of learning and improving educational outcomes. Without their partnership and support, this work would still be an untested idea. They saw the value in learning from teachers and schools to improve outcomes and understood how we could work small and learn fast.

Finally, we'd like to thank our many friends at the Carnegie Foundation for the Advancement of Teaching, who pioneered quality improvement in education and have been a valuable sounding board and contributor to these ideas. They set the foundation for us to learn and we will be eternally grateful.

## Contact info

For more information about this document or our work at Improving Education, please visit us at: [www.improvinged.org](http://www.improvinged.org)

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## Resources

1. "How to Improve." How to Improve. Institute for Healthcare Improvement, n.d. Web. 21 Feb. 2017. <<http://www.ihl.org/resources/Pages/HowtoImprove/default.aspx>>.
2. "The Six Core Principles of Improvement." Carnegie Foundation for the Advancement of Teaching. The Carnegie Foundation, n.d. Web. 21 Feb. 2017. <<https://www.carnegiefoundation.org/our-ideas/six-core-principles-improvement/>>.
3. Bryk, Anthony S., Louis M. Gomez, Alicia Grunow, and Paul G. LeMahieu. Learning to Improve: How America's Schools Can Get Better at Getting Better. Cambridge, MA: Harvard Education, 2015. Print.