



ARE YOUR PROGRAMS READI FOR THE COVID-19 PANDEMIC?

Re-envisioning Teacher Professional Learning Programs to Create Success in Underserved Schools

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While equity has been a priority for years, the COVID-19 pandemic has highlighted and exacerbated inequities like never before. So how do education leaders focus their efforts to address equity in the midst of the COVID-19 pandemic?

The ever-present inequities that the pandemic has exacerbated require leaders to look closely at the initiatives and programs they are implementing and ask, “Does this program truly reduce achievement gaps or contribute to them?”

As content experts on the teacher workforce for the [Center on Great Teachers and Leaders](#), we challenge leaders to ask this tough question because state and district programs often target the needs of **all schools**, **all teachers**, and **all students** when, in fact, the programs are designed in a way that doesn’t cater to schools of greater need. The schools, teachers, and students who need the supports the most are not served by the programs that the state or district has designed.

The READI Framework

Does Your Program...

	Address...	R esource Deficiencies
	Target...	E ducator Supports
	Consider...	A ccountability Requirements
	Counteract...	D isparities in Working Conditions
	Build...	I mplementation Capacity of Staff

[The READI Framework: Closing Gaps by Addressing the Needs of Underserved Schools](#) highlights the fact that despite decades of education reform intended to close opportunity gaps, states and districts continue to struggle to improve outcomes in their lowest performing schools. One key challenge with education reform initiatives is that underserved schools often have fewer resources and less capacity to implement improvement strategies such as new teacher mentoring and induction supports, teacher leadership programs, or Grow Your Own teacher pipeline initiatives. Inequities will continue to gain a foothold through the pandemic; as a result,

districts and schools most in need of support programs will continue to be the least likely to adopt and implement them successfully—a phenomenon that we call the “needs paradox.”

While education leaders generally have good intentions, an honest focus on equity requires leaders to look closely at the initiatives and programs they are putting into place or maintaining and ask themselves, **“Does this program truly reduce the achievement gap or contribute to it?”**

Throughout our combined 20+ years of supporting states and districts in designing programs for school improvement, we consistently see high-need schools dropping out or simply never engaging in well-intentioned district and state programs due to time constraints or other stresses related to accountability pressures, working conditions, and staff turnover. These challenges are well documented throughout the literature.¹

We must stop overlooking our high-need schools by offering programs that cater to the average school and ignore each school’s unique circumstances (e.g., wealthier schools often have support through parent-teacher organizations or other supplements that bolster school budgets).²

The needs paradox will be exacerbated during and after the COVID-19 pandemic crisis. Underserved schools typically serve students who are already struggling, including students with learning differences (i.e., disabilities, emotional trauma, learning disorders, English learners). These students often rely on their schools more than other student groups and are more likely to experience a significant learning loss,³ potential physical and emotional trauma, and general hardship during the COVID-19 crisis. These schools experience significant challenges and may even be less prepared to implement programs related to recovery from the crisis. Teachers in these schools will face a new challenge, of instructing a classroom of students that had very different experiences during the months of the crisis, with more students that are now at greater risk of disengaging and falling behind. **If leaders design recovery efforts without targeting the unique needs and circumstances of these schools and teachers, we will see continued widening of gaps.**

Unless we intentionally tailor programs with underserved students in mind, we are likely developing programs that widen achievement gaps when higher performing, higher-capacity schools adopt and implement the programs we created, rather than the schools that most need these programs.

READI Framework in Indiana

The READI Framework is based on our collaboration with a variety of state and district leaders. One example is our partnership with the Indiana Department of Education and Kokomo School Corporation on mentoring and induction.

The GTL Center’s framework supports states and districts in flipping the narrative of readiness, taking the onus off of high-need schools, and leading with response and relief programs that are designed to succeed in the highest need settings.

We help education leaders ask and answer the tough questions: **Are we ready to meet the needs of our highest need schools, teachers, and students?**

¹ See, for example, Darling-Hammond, 2010; Goldhaber, Lavery, & Theobald, 2015; Goldhaber, Quince, & Theobald, 2016; Isenberg et al., 2016; Sass, Hannaway, Xu, Figlio, & Feng, 2012.

² For more information see EdBuild’s website, which further defines stark funding differences: <https://edbuild.org/content/23-billion>.

³ For details, see Kuhfield & Tarasawa, 2020.

Are we READI as leaders to think about:



Resource deficiencies? Let's think about tailoring supports to address the financial and time limitations of underserved schools while leveraging the unique strengths of participating schools.



Educator supports? Let's provide the supports needed by novice, ineffective, or underprepared teachers to engage more effectively in their work.



Accountability requirements? Let's assess how program design can align with current accountability and school improvement requirements to streamline efforts.



Disparities in working conditions? Let's actively counteract disparities in working conditions that have disproportionately impacted teachers in underserved schools for decades.



Implementation capacity of staff? Let's create and persistently engage in supports and capacity-building services to construct sustainability plans for school and district teams that are consistently overburdened.

The GTL Center offers states and districts a robust consultation package that is grounded in evidence-based technical assistance to support the adaption and implementation of state programs with an emphasis on the READI framework.

Let's make your state program READI for the students and teachers who need your support the most!

For more information, please e-mail us at llachlan@air.org or emizrav@air.org, or visit www.gtlcenter.org.

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