

Why write a Theory of Action?

When we think about the changes that are necessary in schools, we often focus solely on the outcomes we would like to produce (Better test scores! Higher graduation rates! More engaged students!), or on selecting programs or solutions that we believe will produce those results, without fully considering HOW those interventions will actually make the change happen. This can be problematic. Sometimes the selected school reform strategy does not have the impact we expected. Is it because it was not the right match for our problem? Because it had additional unintended consequences? Because we never fully implemented it? If there is a weak link in the intervention, then where is it and what can we do about it? Thinking through a theory of action allows us to more clearly see the chain of changes that will have to happen for the intervention to be successful. This can help us in the planning stage to be sure that the solutions we are choosing truly align with the impact we'd like to see. Later on, it allows us to better identify what about a given intervention is not working so that we can adjust.

School Reform Planning Worksheet #2: Theory of Action

Directions: Use the following sentence stem to create a Theory of Action for your intervention. An example is provided.

SENTENCE STEM

IF we implement (brief strategy description), including the following specific components (program elements)
THEN (circle all that apply) **teachers/administrators/parents** will (adult behaviors) and **students will** (student behaviors and outcomes).

EXAMPLE

IF we implement *strategies to improve the culture and climate of our school*, including the following specific components *restorative justice practices, and a new afterschool mentoring program for students with frequent discipline actions and absences* **THEN** teachers and administrators will *enhance their relationships with students and use more effective conflict resolution techniques*, and students will *feel more positively about their school experience and spend more time engaged in instruction*.

YOUR TURN

IF we implement

including the following specific components

THEN (circle all that apply) **teachers/administrators/parents** will

and **students will**

