

Continuous Improvement Messaging Guide

A Tool for
Talking About
Continuous
Improvement
with Educators

Mass insight
education & research

Introduction and Purpose

Continuous improvement helps educators implement practices that support student success. Schools, districts, and communities with a diverse range of needs have successfully used continuous improvement to tackle persistent problems and advance learning and wellbeing.



At the same time, many educators remain unaware of the value of continuous improvement and what the process entails. Complicating matters is the lack of clarity and alignment around the language used to describe continuous improvement. Additionally, while using continuous improvement to address issues related to equity is a priority for educators and the field, the politicization of equity in education has made equity a polarizing, hot-button topic.

To address these challenges, continuous improvement advocates and experts need to understand the sentiments and beliefs of school- and district-based educators who are potential adopters and future users of continuous improvement—those who may have heard of continuous improvement but are not fully immersed in how it works and all the benefits it can bring. By understanding this audience’s perspectives, the field can learn which continuous improvement ideas and messages are most resonant and motivating.

With support from the Bill & Melinda Gates Foundation, Mass Insight partnered with OpinionWorks, a market research firm, and The Hatcher Group, a strategic communications firm, to conduct a field study and develop research-based messaging to

promote understanding of continuous improvement and its value among educators.

Based on this research, we’ve created this guide to **provide shared messaging recommendations and sample messages to bring clarity, alignment, and power to how advocates, facilitators, and experts communicate about continuous improvement.** Our view is that a strong and cohesive narrative can increase educators’ awareness of continuous improvement’s value and broader uptake of the method.

We’ve designed this guide to be flexible and broadly applicable because we know that continuous improvement experts, advocates, and technical assistance providers already have effective ways to communicate about continuous improvement and the particular services and supports they offer to schools and districts. We also know that they frequently tailor their communications based on school and district needs. The messages in this guide are not meant to replace what already works or negate the need for customized communications based on audiences’ unique circumstances or providers’ offerings. We hope that it helps the continuous improvement field collectively position continuous improvement as an effective, compelling way forward for the nation’s districts and schools.

Finally, we’d like this guide, and the process used to develop it, to embody the spirit of continuous improvement. We welcome feedback about how it’s being used and received so that, together, we can strengthen it based on our collective learnings.

How This Guide Was Developed

This guide is rooted in the findings from rigorous, multistage audience research that sought to understand the perceptions, sentiments, and motivations of school- and district-based educators on the topic of continuous improvement.

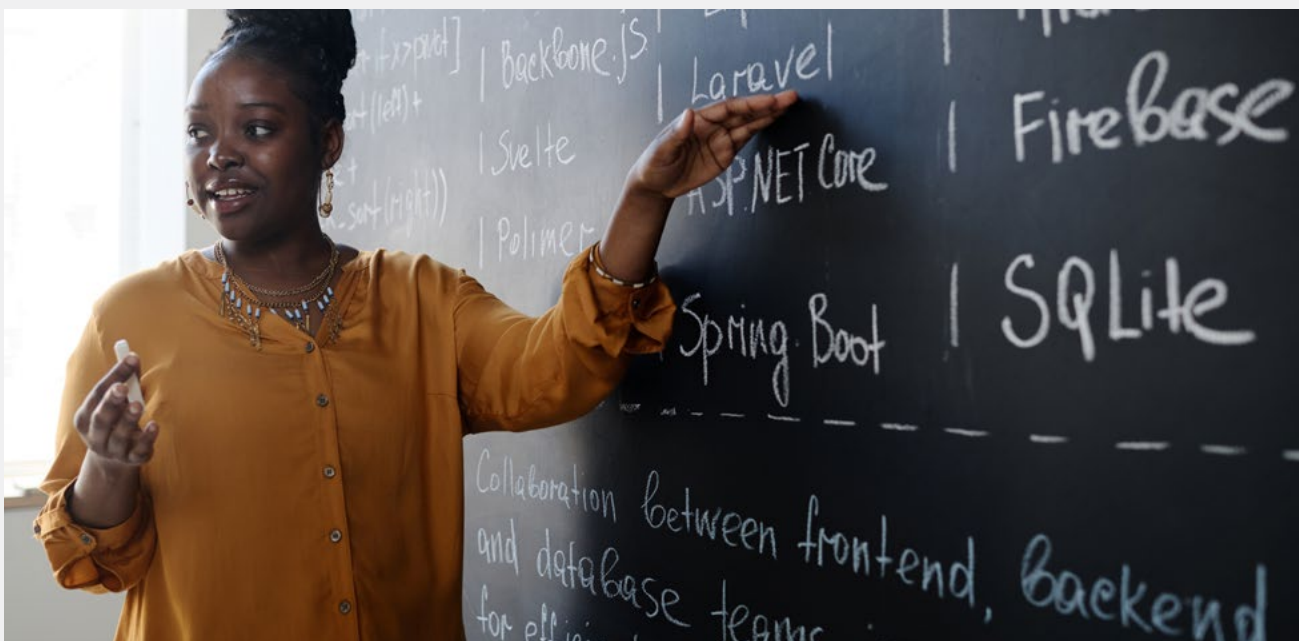
Mass Insight, Hatcher, and OpinionWorks began with a national survey of educators who work in schools and districts with significant percentages of students from marginalized backgrounds. We chose these educators because continuous improvement represents an opportunity to address the urgent and pervasive inequities students are facing. The survey was designed to rapidly elicit their broad viewpoints about continuous improvement and their reactions to core definitions and concepts.

From there, the research team conducted eight qualitative small group discussions for deeper exploration. The small groups were comprised of individuals with varying levels of familiarity with continuous improvement and from regions

across the country. More groups focused on administrators than teachers because they are primary decisionmakers in adopting continuous improvement. To match our target audience, the majority of groups included educators that had low to some interest in or familiarity with continuous improvement.

Based on the survey and small group findings, we developed and refined messages about continuous improvement. We then tested, co-created, and edited the messages with educators in four additional small groups. [For more details on the demographics of the research participants and small group composition, please see the Appendix.]

In addition to the audience research, we engaged continuous improvement thought leaders through individual and small group conversations and surveys. They included continuous improvement providers as well as program officers from the Bill & Melinda Gates Foundation who work with the Networks for School Improvement.



How to Use This Guide

Users of this guide could include:

- **Continuous improvement advocates and thought leaders**
- **Technical assistance providers**
- **School improvement intermediaries, networks, and coalitions**
- **School and district partners who provide continuous improvement supports**

This guide is meant to inform communications with school- and district-based educators and decisionmakers who are potential or recent adopters of continuous improvement. Schools and districts who are newer to continuous improvement and are working to socialize the method among their staff and partners may also find value in this guide. This guide, however, is not a handbook on how to implement continuous improvement.

We've designed the guide to flexibly support an array of communication needs related to continuous improvement. The guide begins with an overview of four primary and overarching findings from the audience research. Then, the messaging section of the guide encompasses:

1. detailed insights from the audience research,
2. research-based messaging recommendations so that users can craft and customize their own language while adhering to the audience research findings, and
3. sample language to show how the messaging recommendations can be applied and to provide a helpful starting point for users to customize for their own needs and contexts.



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Key Research Findings

Our audience research uncovered four overarching themes in audience perceptions of continuous improvement that can inform how we talk about the approach. Please note, the research reflects what audiences perceive and believe as related to continuous improvement, which may not be full or accurate. The related messaging recommendations are meant to meet audiences where they are and enhance their understanding.

THEME #1

Educators want agency + collaboration

THEME #2:

How we talk about equity matters

THEME #3:

Asset-based framing and acknowledgment of challenges resonates

THEME #4:

Language and tone make a difference

Below we dive deeper into the findings related to each theme and the implications for messaging:

THEME #1

Educators want agency + collaboration

Educators want to collaborate. They also want agency in solving the challenges they are closest to. Highlighting both of these elements of continuous improvement was appealing and animating for the teachers we spoke with. On the other hand, they don't want to be the only ones at the table expected to have all the answers. Striking the right balance between the two ideas can help educators feel both empowered and supported by continuous improvement.

Messaging Recommendations:

- Establish that continuous improvement engages individuals from across roles, levels, and departments—including but not limited to teachers. It's also worth noting that continuous improvement can include community partners and students. Confirm that diverse perspectives will be engaged in problem solving.
- Speak to teachers' expertise in addressing the challenges they are facing. Acknowledge that continuous improvement can help scale solutions they are already implementing or create consensus around a solution across their school or district.
- Some educators are wary that continuous improvement evaluates individuals or holds them personally accountable for results. Be careful not to suggest or imply that continuous improvement can be used for high-stakes, individual, or punitive accountability.

THEME #2

How we talk about equity matters

Most educators are committed to equity as a priority in education. Overall, they agree that inequity exists and that addressing it is both positive and necessary. Despite this broad support, how we talk about equity and its connection to continuous improvement matters to educators and can ultimately strengthen or weaken their support for the approach. Chief among their concerns is the polarized political climate and the fear that educators can be caught in the crosshairs. Apprehension about how equity is approached and talked about was prevalent for educators in both politically conservative states, such as Texas, Florida, and South Carolina, and politically liberal regions, including New England and California. Still, some educators emphasized the need for discomfort in conversations about equity. Others anticipate and have experienced significant pushback, particularly when equity is framed in ways that emphasize racism or position systemic inequities as the sole cause of education's biggest challenges.

Messaging Recommendations:

- Do not avoid mentioning equity and related phrases but be intentional about its use. It should not feel like an afterthought. At the same time, it should not be positioned as the only cause of systemic educational problems or the only reason why continuous improvement should be adopted.
- Avoid the word "historical" when talking about inequities, which can imply they are problems of the past. This phrasing can also feel to some educators like they are being asked to tackle a problem too big for them to meaningfully solve or address.

- Talking about success for “every student” or “each student” is inclusive and asset-based language that personalizes the concept of equity by connecting it to students; educators are motivated by their individual students and their growth and success. When continuous improvement’s role in equity is communicated in broad, big picture terms, it weakens educators’ interest and engagement with continuous improvement. It is worth noting that while this “every student” or “each student” language resonated with target audiences, it does not reflect an understanding of equity that recognizes the need to address varying levels of privilege among students.

THEME #3

Asset-based framing and acknowledgment of challenges resonates

Educators expressed a desire for both asset-based language that centers students and empathetic statements that acknowledge the real challenges they face every day. A balance is needed to acknowledge their current reality and also look ahead to a better future that takes a strengths-based approach to solving big challenges.

Messaging Recommendations:

- Focus on students. Centering students was galvanizing for educators, and student success is really the end goal for all school improvement efforts that every educator in every role could rally behind.
- Empathize with educators. An acknowledgement of the problems shows an understanding of the reality they face every day. Just don’t dwell there.
- Do not mention COVID. Educators overwhelmingly stated that they are tired of hearing about it and they want to look ahead.

THEME #4

Language and tone make a difference

Educators had strong opinions about the tone and language of the messages. They recommended careful and precise word choice and descriptive language while avoiding overly vague and sweeping terms. This recommendation is important to keep in mind across written and verbal messaging about continuous improvement.

Messaging Recommendations:

- Use the word “educators” when talking about teachers, school leaders, and district staff. Focus group participants were hard-pressed to think of individuals who work in education who don’t consider themselves to be educators. The term was appropriately inclusive.
- Limit use of “buzzy” or over-used terms and ideas. These included phrases like “scientific method,” “problems of practice,” and “systems change.” Similarly, use fewer cliché phrases like “Band-aid solution,” “trial and error,” and “spinning your wheels.”
- Keep the tone serious but accessible.
- Speak in the voice of the educator. Look for opportunities to use first person plural and avoid phrases that may come across as packaged to educators, meant to market or persuade instead of describe and engage. Some phrases such as, “big problems” came across as vague, non-educator language, and language like, “have the power,” “teachers don’t have to do it alone,” and “high quality learning experiences” came across as marketing speak.

Key Messages

Defining Continuous Improvement

Educators found a concise, bulleted definition of the key components of continuous improvement to be helpful in understanding the process and generating buy-in. After testing a definition that was co-created with Gates Foundation program staff, we collaborated with educators to revise the definition, lifting up aspects that they found most resonant while fine-tuning points that were muddled or off-putting.

Messaging Recommendations:

- Educators responded positively to continuous improvement's systematic and collaborative nature. Other ideas that engaged them positively were: understanding root causes of problems, starting small and building on learning, and giving agency to educators closest to the problem. Elevate these points when talking about what continuous improvement is and how it works.
- Take care when framing continuous improvement as quick or rapid. Educators want to know the process is thoughtful and thorough, but that the feedback is quick.
- Avoid jargon. Even widespread educational terms such as "formative measures," did not land as well with educators because people hear such terms differently, or not everyone knows what they mean.
- Don't go too deep in the details of what continuous improvement is without first explaining why it matters and how it can help address challenges or opportunities.

FULL DEFINITION

This is the longer, more technical definition of CI, meant to elaborate on its key, critical components.

Continuous improvement is a proven way to address problems of practice by understanding their root causes and testing ideas for solving them. The approach:

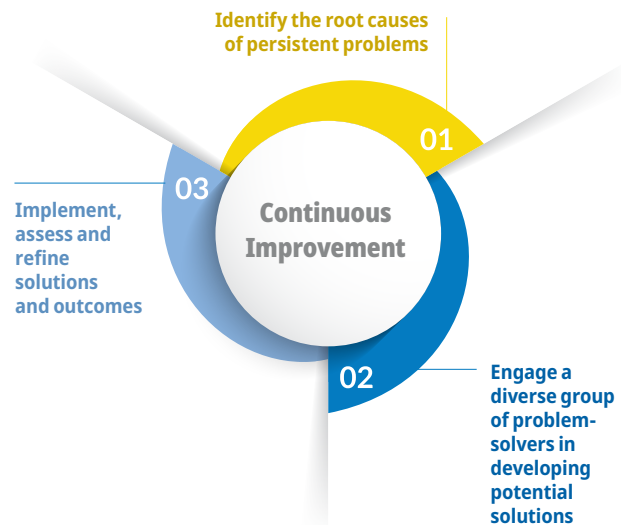
- Is cyclical and systematic: It includes identifying a potential solution, testing it, gathering and analyzing data about the results, and collectively deciding what comes next.
- Is collaborative: It involves a diverse group of problem-solvers and gives agency to educators closest to the challenge.
- Starts small and builds on what's learned by moving intentionally through the process and using readily available measures that provide fast and ongoing feedback.
- Views any result as an opportunity for further improvement.

Educators emphasized the importance of sequencing and grouping these steps—what's here reflects the arrangement they found most appealing and logical.

SHORT DESCRIPTION

The short description is a concise, jargon-free description of continuous improvement that breaks the process down into three easy-to-understand steps. It might be used to verbally introduce the concept to a new audience or to succinctly summarize the idea in written materials or media opportunities such as interviews and op-eds.

Continuous improvement is a cyclical approach that aims to (1) identify the root causes of persistent problems; (2) engage a diverse group of problem-solvers, particularly educators closest to the challenge, to develop a potential solution; and (3) implement, assess and refine solutions and outcomes.



SHORTER DESCRIPTION

This shorter description can be used when brevity is necessary, such as in a news article where continuous improvement must be quickly and concisely explained.

Continuous improvement is a cyclical process in which educators collaborate to develop, test, and refine solutions to persistent problems.

Why Continuous Improvement?

When communicating about continuous improvement, educators unanimously agreed that leading with the “why” is the most compelling approach. The why is the hook that motivates educators to want to learn more and buy in to the process. It may appear on the first slide in a presentation about continuous improvement; it may kick off a conversation with a school leader; or it might precede a longer explanation of what continuous improvement is in a report or article.

Messaging Recommendations:

- You'll most likely tailor the why to specific challenges or opportunities facing the school or district you're speaking with. Don't shy away from talking about the problems; educators want to know that you understand the realities they are grappling with.
- But the why should also be future-focused. It should take an asset-based approach to problem solving, moving quickly to how continuous improvement can help identify solutions.
- The why is an opportunity to focus on the aspects of continuous improvement that are most appealing to your audience – continuous improvement is manageable, collaborative and effective. The most appealing concept was the idea that continuous improvement is manageable; once adopted and integrated into a school or district's regular practice, continuous improvement does not mean more work. In fact, it aims to help educators more efficiently use their time and energy to focus on helping their students thrive.
- The why should make the connection to student and educator success. How does addressing the specific challenge or opportu-

nity at hand help improve student outcomes? How does it help both students and teachers thrive?

WHY MESSAGING

“Building block” messaging examples with high-level language about continuous improvement are provided, which can be customized and combined for context and audience. A combined or more formal version may be useful for written reports, collateral, presentations, web copy and articles.

The Problem: Every educator wants to support student success. Continuous improvement can eliminate roadblocks that stand in their way. These challenges can be instructional, or they may be related to school climate and culture, recruitment and retention, resource distribution, and more. Some of these problems are caused by societal or educational inequity. Others are specific to how a school or district operates.

This broad problem statement can be used to talk about continuous improvement more generally, including equity-related issues such as resource distribution or educational inequity at a high level. If speaking with an individual school or district leader, you can tailor this section to speak to the specific challenges they are facing. In any scenario, starting with an asset-based statement about the shared goal of student success can help build buy-in and interest right away.

The Bridge: When we work together to solve these challenges, the result is a better education and a brighter future for young people.

Educators want problems to be acknowledged, but they don't want to dwell there. A brief transitional statement that focuses on working together towards a solution can help bring the conversation back to continuous improvement.

The Solution: Continuous improvement is an effective and collaborative process for solving all types of problems. It helps us grow new ideas and elevate practices that already work. The approach makes problem-solving manageable and practical by starting small and building from what's learned. Embedded in continuous improvement is a focus on fostering equitable and positive outcomes for all students, ultimately helping every student and educator thrive.

In talking about continuous improvement as a way to solve the previously-mentioned challenges, you should acknowledge that the school or district has already been making efforts to improve. You can also point to how continuous improvement works because it's manageable and practical, an appealing concept for educators. You may bring in the concept of equity here in terms of outcomes for all students, which did not cause concern among focus groups. Ending on a future-facing, positive note that speaks to both student and educator success resonated – educators liked that they too were called out specifically as a beneficiary of these efforts.



Below are a few more example why statements that condense these concepts; each focuses on one particular angle that appealed to educators:

SHORT WHY STATEMENT: PROBLEM-SOLUTION

Short (problem-solution): Every educator wants to support student success. Continuous improvement can eliminate roadblocks that stand in their way. It's an effective and collaborative process to both grow new ideas and build on practices that already work.

SHORT WHY STATEMENT: ASSET-BASED

Short (asset-based): All schools have the same goal: support student success. Continuous improvement is a proven approach for advancing that goal. Whether you employ it to recruit the best and brightest teachers or strengthen school climate, the result is a better education and enhanced learning for young people.

SHORT WHY STATEMENT: MANAGEABLE PROCESS

Short (manageable process): Continuous improvement is an effective and collaborative method for solving all types of problems so that educators don't have to address challenges on their own. The approach makes problem-solving manageable and practical by starting small and building on its learning. It ultimately aims to help both educators and students thrive.

Communicating the Value of Continuous Improvement

VALUE MESSAGES

The language establishing “why continuous improvement?” in the previous section captures the value of the approach at a very high level. In addition, more specific and highly motivating benefits of continuous improvement can increase educators' buy in. Our message testing revealed that while some of these benefits appeal to most educators, others are particularly persuasive for either teachers or administrators.

The following value messages are **organized by audience role** and can be used to expand on the value of continuous improvement—especially for those who are warm to the idea but may need additional proof points to fully embrace the approach or build the case for other decisionmakers. We anticipate that these value messages would often be shared during one-on-one or small group conversations with school and district personnel.

For Both Teachers And Administrators

Continuous improvement...

Promotes collaboration. Solving major problems in education isn't something that educators should be expected to do alone. Continuous improvement engages teams in analyzing and solving problems together. It promotes collaboration and teamwork among school staff, taps collective brainpower to unearth creative solutions and ideas, and gets everyone on the same page about what works and what doesn't.

Note:

- The idea that continuous improvement brings groups of diverse problem solvers together resonated with educators. It's worth emphasizing this point.

- It could also be helpful to clarify that continuous improvement is a way to help educators and other professionals like social workers, guidance counselors, afterschool staff—who may or may not be based at the school or district—work closely and share ideas.

Has a strong evidence base. Continuous improvement works. Research shows that schools and districts have used this method to improve student achievement, educator professional development, school processes and systems, and more. It can be used successfully within a variety of contexts, geographic settings, levels of student need, and size of community.

Notes:

- Educators are not impressed that continuous improvement has been used successfully in other industries. Avoid mentioning its use in healthcare and manufacturing because, at best, it doesn't seem relevant and, at worst, diminishes how unique education is and equates learning and human relationships with less people-centered industries.
- Share specific examples and outcomes that demonstrate how continuous improvement has been used successfully. Educators are looking for success stories from schools and districts that are similar to theirs in community characteristics, size, resources available, and student population.
- Be honest about the conditions that will help continuous improvement take hold but don't convey such a high bar that the cost of entry/adoption feels too high.
- Remind your audience that every school, no matter how high-performing, has areas they want to improve. Continuous improvement is for schools performing at all levels.

Goes deep to understand root cause of problems. Understanding the *why* behind challenges in education is often the key to determining how to solve the problem. Continuous improvement goes below the surface to understand those root causes and anchor its solutions there. This approach can help schools and districts move beyond temporary fixes to meaningful, long-term improvements that address problems at their source.

Note:

- Educators like the idea of understanding the root causes of challenges but you should avoid giving the impression that continuous improvement begins and ends there. Move quickly to how understanding the root causes leads to actionable and practical solutions.

For Teachers

Continuous improvement...

Is often educator-led. Continuous improvement often centers educators in a diverse group of problem-solvers who use their expertise and experience to develop solutions to challenges. It helps educators test, spread, and scale their good ideas in a supportive, structured environment that engages them as leaders but doesn't expect them to do this work alone.

Note:

- With this message, it's important to balance the idea of teacher agency and leadership with the assurance that teachers are not left to solve tough challenges or advance practice on their own.

Features strategies most educators already use. Many educators are already doing a form of continuous improvement when they test different strategies and approaches in their own classrooms. They may try out a new instructional approach, see how it works over the course of a month, refine it, and implement a new version. Implementing continuous improvement helps take something that comes naturally to educators and more formally organizes it in a collaborative effort toward improvements that benefit everyone.

Note:

- The example embedded in this message should resonate with the teachers you're speaking with, but if you know of a more specific example from that individual, school or district, swap it in instead.

For Administrators

Continuous improvement...

Makes progress feasible and manageable. The approach provides a clear structure for solving challenges by breaking them down into addressable, achievable chunks. The goal: to identify solutions that are scalable, practical, and proven to work.

Note:

- Avoid referencing systems-level change or inadvertently reinforcing how hard change and progress can be. The goal here is to position continuous improvement as a process that is practical and doable.

Is often educator-led. As the ones often closest to their students' successes and challenges, educators' insights should be valued and elevated. By centering educators as key developers and testers of new ideas and solutions, continuous improvement surfaces their innovative thinking, elevates diverse perspectives, and generates buy-in among your staff.

Note:

- This message for administrators emphasizes the values of diverse perspectives and staff engagement rather than the agency and support combination that takes center stage in the teacher message. If administrators want to build buy-in about continuous improvement among their staff, they should use the teacher message.

Enables efficient use of resources. Continuous improvement can help education leaders effectively and efficiently use and distribute resources by identifying solutions that make an impact in their school's or district's context *before* committing to full-scale implementation and investment. Also, because continuous improvement involves staff and educators closest to the problem, you don't need to devote substantial resources to adding personnel or purchasing solutions.

Note:

- Be honest about the costs of training staff and implementing processes and systems for tracking outcomes but emphasize the up-front and durable nature of the investments.

Can help showcase your progress. Education leaders are under tremendous pressure to show results to parents, decisionmakers, and community members. However, we know that progress often happens in small steady increments. Continuous improvement can help you tell the story of your impact because the process features a clearly defined problem or opportunity, detailed next steps, and data-driven outcomes—all of which can be communicated to help you share your progress, both small and large.

Note:

- This concept came up after the focus groups through conversations with NSIs, but it resonates with what we heard from administrators about how they often need to respond to community pressures with evidence of success.

Is broadly applicable. Many may think of continuous improvement as a way to address instructional or school climate issues. But it can also be applied broadly to other persistent challenges such as teacher retention, district resource management, parent involvement, and more. Once school and district teams learn the process, continuous improvement can be used to drive progress at the classroom, school, and district levels.

Note:

- This message resonated the most with administrators because they are more likely than teachers to be concerned about addressing challenges beyond those that are instructional in nature. The examples of continuous improvement's broad relevance could be swapped out with examples that relate to teachers' pain points or spheres of influence (e.g., attendance and grading policies) to make the message more resonant with teachers.

Shifting Narratives around Continuous Improvement

A narrative shift refers to a fundamental change in the way a concept or idea is being communicated, and thus, perceived. At the broad, conceptual level, continuous improvement does not require a narrative shift. The way educators instinctively think or feel about the approach—their general sense of its purpose, how it works, and its benefits—aligns with continuous improvement research and practice. However, our qualitative research revealed some educator-held assumptions or concerns about specific aspects of continuous improvement for which narrative shifts would be beneficial.



Through our audience research, we also learned that stories and examples can be effective tools for communicating about continuous improvement and its value and shifting narratives. However, not all stories are created equal. Here's what we learned from educators about the story elements that matter to them:

Key elements of successful stories:

- **Emphasize outcomes:** Educators are interested in results. The most effective examples of continuous improvement will go beyond describing the problem and approach to sharing the outcomes—for students, educators, or both groups. Results can be communicated in various ways—they don't have to be detailed data points or test results—but any example should give educators a clear understanding of the bottom-line impact that continuous improvement had.
- **Context matters:** Educators want to know that continuous improvement works in settings, contexts, and with student populations like their own. So be thoughtful about the examples you choose to share. An example from a rural high school in the Pacific Northwest may not be the best choice for a coalition of elementary schools from Atlanta.
- **Highlight educator and student voice:** While outcomes and data points are of interest, educators also want to hear stories told from the point of view of an individual student or educator. They want to hear from fellow educators what the continuous improvement process has meant for *them*.

Below, we share four common assumptions and concerns, along with messages and example stories for moving educators from point A to point B in their thinking on these areas.

NARRATIVE SHIFT #1:
Overwhelm to Relief



Messaging Points:

- Once staff understand the fundamentals of continuous improvement and the basic processes are in place, a school or district's work becomes more efficient and solutions oriented.
- Continuous improvement is a way to organize the work we are already doing (or need to do) so that we can discover more effective and streamlined approaches.
- When continuous improvement helps solve problems, it can free up much-needed time and space for educators to use as they see fit.

Example Story:

A college access network of 30 high schools was working to increase FAFSA completion rates because research shows that when more families complete the form, more students go to and graduate from college. One high school held a traditional family night where they talked to the whole group about the importance of FAFSA. Another high school in the same district also held a family night, but organized families into small groups in classrooms where they got hands-on help to fill out the FAFSA. When the network reviewed their data, the small group support led to many more families actually completing the FAFSA. Helping families in small groups provided a quicker, better way to reach the desired outcomes.

NARRATIVE SHIFT #2

Instruction Only to Broadly Applicable



Messaging Points:

- Continuous improvement is an effective way to solve all types of education problems, including problems that are not instructional in nature. It can be applied to climate and culture, staff management, recruitment and retention, resource distribution, family engagement, and more.
- Continuous improvement can be used to address challenges at the classroom, school, district, and community levels.
- This versatility is helpful because many education challenges—even those that initially may seem to be instructional—have root causes and corresponding solutions that extend beyond classroom practice.

Example Story:

Either need an example story—like the FAFSA one—that is not instructional in nature to show how continuous improvement can be employed in other contexts. OR, also helpful: A story where a school or district learned a problem they initially thought was instructional had a non-instructional solution. (Ex: GRAD Partnership and attendance example?)

NARRATIVE SHIFT #3

Evaluative to Empowering



Messaging Points:

- Continuous improvement is focused on collective progress. It creates a supportive and safe environment for trying out ideas and solutions.
- If our ideas don't lead to the outcomes we want, we learn from them and keep trying.
- Continuous improvement is not a mechanism for teacher evaluation or educator accountability.

Example Story:

An example of where an initial solution didn't work so the group tried something else could be helpful here. To show the group collectively driving toward improvement and demonstrate that taking risks and learning from them is an encouraged and natural part of continuous improvement.

NARRATIVE SHIFT #4

Initiative Churn to Solution Stickiness



Messaging Points:

- Continuous improvement is a method for intentionally testing ideas or solutions in efficient and controlled ways to see if it works before committing to a full-scale initiative or implementation.
- Continuous improvement can save valuable time and energy by learning what works before broader roll out of an idea.

Example Story:

Would be great to share a story where a commonly held hypothesis turned out not to be correct, saving a school or district from broadly implementing a plan or idea and redirecting to a more effective solution.



Say This, Not That

Our audience research uncovered common terms or phrases related to continuous improvement that evoked questions, concerns, or negative responses from educators. Below, we offer suggested replacements for those terms and considerations – keeping in mind that context will always be paramount in deciding on the best phrase to use.

SAY THIS...

NOT THAT...

Fast (or quick) feedback	Rapid cycle
Intentionally tests	Rapidly tests
Accessible measures, readily available measures	Formative measures
Educators	Teachers and leaders
Inequities, (or name the specific inequities to which you are referring such as funding disparities; lack of access to highly qualified teachers/advanced coursework/high-quality summer learning opportunities, etc.)	Historical inequities
Disparities in [access/opportunities/support/a sense of belonging/word(s) most relevant for your context] for [students of color/specific relevant student population]	Systemic racism
Persistent challenges (or name specific challenges)	Systems change
Accelerate learning, advance practice	Support COVID recovery; address COVID-related learning loss
School climate and culture challenges	Behavioral issues



Acknowledgements

TK

Appendix

Research Audience and Methods

PHASE 1

National Survey of Educators (April – May 2023)

- 279 educators nationally
- Recruited through list purchase and partner outreach
- Schools/Districts with significant percentage of Black, Latino, low-income students
- Broad overview of perceptions about and reactions to definitions and concepts

Qualitative Small Groups (June 2023)

- Eight small groups, conducted virtually, recruited from the survey sample
- In-depth exploration of concepts

	Continuous Improvement Use/familiarity	Region	Role
GROUP 1	Uses continuous improvement	National	Admin
GROUP 2	Uses continuous improvement	National	Teachers
GROUP 3	Some interest/familiarity	Mid-west/Mountain	Admin
GROUP 4	Low to no interest/familiarity	Mid-west/Mountain	Admin
GROUP 5	Low to some interest/familiarity	Coastal	Teachers
GROUP 6	Low to some interest/familiarity	Coastal	Admin
GROUP 7	Low to some interest/familiarity	California	Admin
GROUP 8	Low to some interest/familiarity	Texas/Florida	Admin

PHASE 2

Message Refinement Small Groups (August 2023)

- Four small groups, conducted virtually
- Co-creation exercise; concept and language refinement

	Continuous Improvement Use/familiarity	Region	Role
GROUP 1	Familiar	Participated in June	Teachers
GROUP 2	Familiar	Participated in June	Admin
GROUP 3	Familiar	New Participants	Admin
GROUP 4	Less familiar	New Participants	Admin



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