

# NEA Guide to Educator-Led School Improvement and the GPS Indicators Framework



## The Path to Success

Student success. These two words define the career and aspirations of three million professional educators. The words are simple, but the task is not. Students come into America's public school classrooms with very different needs, backgrounds, levels of preparation, and support. Educators work hard to develop the potential, independence, and character of every student who shows up in our classrooms. But we know there are very real barriers to students' academic success, including the underlying issues of hunger, poverty, and prejudice that has concretized systemic racism and privilege, family instability, and illness. We desperately want to help students overcome these obstacles to achievement. We continually ask ourselves how we can elevate all of our students and give them the knowledge and skills they need to thrive in this challenging 21st century world. We are committed to creating great public schools for all students. That's why in 2008, the National Education Association (NEA), in collaboration with the nation's top education experts, developed the Great Public Schools (GPS) Indicators Framework ([nea.org/gpsindicators](http://nea.org/gpsindicators)). The GPS Indicators Framework showcases the research- and evidence-based resources, policies, and practices that are integral to making our public schools great—these seven criteria are crucial to student success.

The seven criteria are:

- Quality programs and services that meet the full range of all children's needs so that they come to school every day ready and able to learn
- High expectations and standards with a rigorous and comprehensive curriculum for all students
- Quality conditions for teaching and lifelong learning
- A qualified, caring, diverse, and stable workforce
- Shared responsibility for appropriate school accountability by stakeholders at all levels
- Parental, family, and community involvement and engagement
- Adequate, equitable, and sustainable funding

We believe these criteria will:

- Prepare all students for the future with 21st century skills
- Create enthusiasm for learning and engage all students in the classroom
- Close achievement gaps and raise achievement for all students
- Ensure that all educators have the resources and tools they need to get the job done

## How to Use this Guide

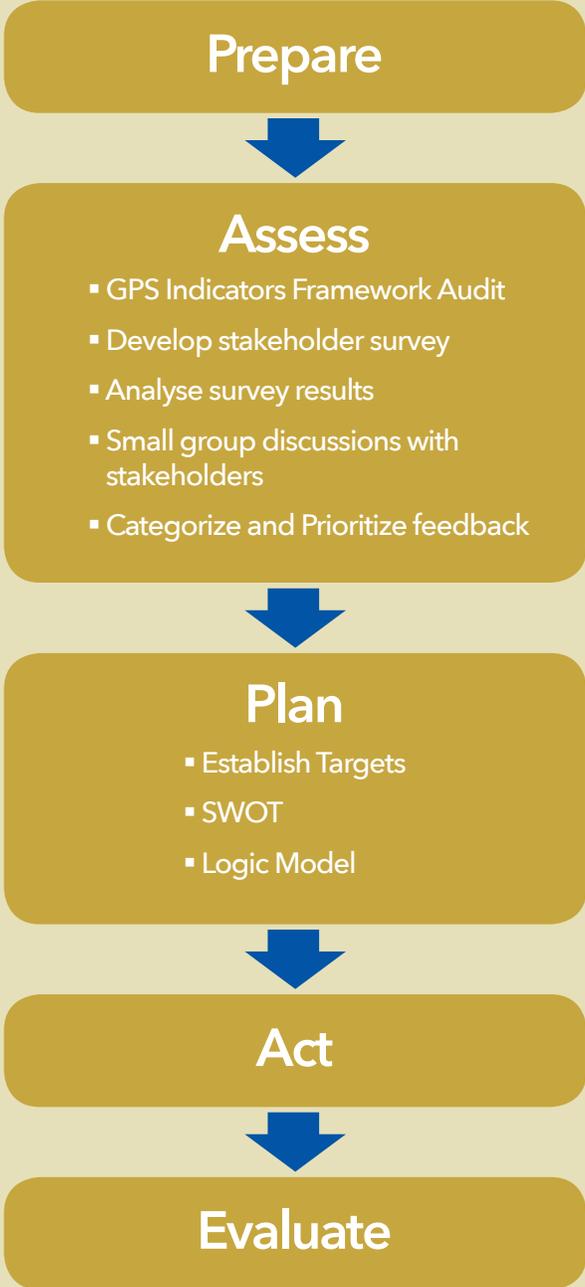
It is not enough to have a framework; we must actually use this framework to create real change within our schools. This guide was designed for leaders striving for excellence in their schools and aims to assist educators in their efforts to transform their schools into great public schools and demonstrates how to apply the GPS Indicators Framework in the school improvement process. The guide also shows how the Framework informs other strategic planning tools such as the SWOT grid and Logic Model. Further, although not the focus here, the guide can be used to inform and develop a student-centered campaign. The school improvement process closely resembles the student-centered campaign process.

The Framework not only addresses the research- and evidence-based resources, policies, and practices proven to narrow opportunity and skills gaps, but also enables users to evaluate how well states, districts, and schools provide and implement the resources, policies, and practices critical to student success. In other words, the indicators within the Framework can be used to pinpoint gaps between what currently exists within your state, district, and/or school and what is needed to create a great public school.

The transformation into a great public school will require work—specifically teamwork—stakeholder involvement, dedication to change, and several other tools (identified later in this guide) in addition to the GPS Framework. After the process, however, users will have a clear set of priorities, targets, and a plan for their schools.

This guide is an abridged version of the school improvement process and focuses on the assessment and planning phases, only.

## The School Improvement Process



# Assess – Identify the Problem(s)

After completing the first phase of the improvement process, use the GPS Indicators Framework to begin identifying gaps between your school and a great public school. You can find a copy of the Framework at [nea.org/gpsindicators](http://nea.org/gpsindicators).

## 1. GPS Indicators Framework–Initial Audit

Have your team draft a list of challenges. Initiate the conversation by asking guiding questions:

- What is working in our district/school?
- What are the gaps in services?
- Where are there duplications?
- What services should be linked?
- Are services accessible?

After the brainstorm, go through the entire GPS Framework with your team. The Framework functions as an auditing tool, assisting users in identifying gaps between current school resources, policies, and practices and necessary resources, policies, and practices.

GPS Indicators Framework Sample:

SUBCRITERIA	Standards and Curriculum		ABC High School Audit	
	Comprehensive Curriculum Content			
INDICATORS	<b>Resources</b>	State provides funding to implement rigorous courses aligned with college- and career-ready standards for all districts.*	X	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>■ Our school has received funding for two Honors English courses, one AP English course, and one AP history course, only.</li> </ul>
		State provides funding to all districts for fine arts education.	X	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>■ Our school does not have any fine arts courses.</li> </ul>
		State provides funding to all districts for physical education.	X	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>■ Our school no longer provides physical education (P.E.).</li> </ul>
		<p><i>* Rigorous courses could include dual enrollment, Honors, Advanced Placement (AP), International Baccalaureate (IB), and career and technical education (CTE) certification</i></p>		

SUBCRITERIA CRITERIA	Standards and Curriculum	ABC High School Audit	
	Comprehensive Curriculum Content		
INDICATORS	<p><b>Policies &amp; Practices</b></p> <p>State developed a policy that requires alignment between curricular content and rigorous standards that address the needs of students of all abilities, linguistic, and cultural backgrounds in all academic subjects.</p> <p>State policy recognizes the value of fine arts in curricula.</p> <p>State policy recognizes physical education as a core subject.</p> <p>Schools align curriculum content to rigorous standards that address the needs of students of all abilities, linguistic, and cultural backgrounds in all academic subjects.</p> <p>Schools offer fine arts education to their students.</p> <p>Schools implement the National Association of Sport and Physical Education (NASPE) standards for physical education.*</p> <p>Schools use the community as a contextualized learning environment.**</p> <p><i>*NASPE recommends 150 minutes of instructional physical education for elementary school students and 225 minutes for middle and high school students per week for the entire school year.</i></p> <p><i>**Connect education to community through public libraries, zoos, parks, work experience opportunities, service learning, the school library, and afterschool programs.</i></p>	<p>X</p> <p>X</p> <p>X</p> <p>X</p> <p>X</p> <p>X</p> <p>X</p>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>■ Our school has rigorous standards for all students, but only has AP English and history courses.</li> <li>■ The state has no such policy. Our school has no policy stating the importance of fine arts.</li> <li>■ The state recognizes P.E. as a core subject, but our school has no such policy.</li> <li>■ Our school has rigorous standards for all students, but only has AP English and history courses.</li> <li>■ Our school does not offer fine arts.</li> <li>■ Our school no longer offers P.E.</li> <li>■ Our school does provide field trips but does not offer service learning, and we no longer have a school library.</li> </ul>

Standards and Curriculum		ABC High School Audit	
Comprehensive Curriculum Content			
SUBCRITERIA	CRITERIA		
INDICATORS	OUTPUTS		
	Percentage of students enrolled in a Gifted and Talented education program.	X	■ 0 percent-Our school does not have this program.
	Percentage of students enrolled in at least one AP course.	X	■ 60 percent of our students are enrolled in at least one AP course.
	Percentage of high school seniors who have completed all college-preparatory courses in math and science.*	X	■ 0 percent-Our school does not offer physics or calculus.
	Percentage of students enrolled in a fine arts course.	X	■ 0 percent-Our school does not offer fine arts.
	Percentage of students enrolled in a P.E. course that meets NASPE standards.	X	■ 0 percent-Our school does not offer P.E.
	Percentage of students participating in service learning and/or an afterschool program.	X	■ 70 percent of our students participate in afterschool programs.
	*College preparatory courses are algebra I, algebra II, geometry, trigonometry, calculus, biology, chemistry, and physics.		

### ABC High School Example

*It is clear from the audit that the school does not have the necessary resources, policies, or practices to meet satisfactory output levels. A great public school would have all of the required inputs and would produce satisfactory outputs. For this particular subcriterion, a great public school would have funding for a wide range of courses, would implement courses like P.E., fine arts, and calculus, and would have a high percentage of students completing college preparatory courses. The team reviews the audit and agrees the lack of rigorous courses (i.e., Honors and AP) and college preparatory courses (e.g., calculus and physics) are major issues.*

## 2. Survey

After identifying gaps with your team, develop a survey for other stakeholders in the school improvement process. Surveys are a great way to solicit feedback from other staff, parents, students, and community members. The survey will either confirm challenges and priorities already discovered by your team, highlight challenges and priorities previously unknown by your team, or both.

Survey tips:

- Administer the survey at existing meetings such as PTA, community meetings, and staff meetings.
- Insert questions based on the GPS Indicators Framework audit.
- Surveys should not exceed 25 questions.
- Surveys should be designed to force respondents to make a choice.
- Aim for a 95 percent confidence level with a +/-2 or 3 sampling error.
- Surveys should represent all stakeholders (e.g., parents, students, community members, school staff) and may take a few months to collect.

The following are modified sample survey questions from Robert Ewy's guide on strategic planning:<sup>1</sup>

1. What are the greatest challenges our school faces over the next five years (choose only five of your highest priorities from the list)?

- Preparing students for college
- Hiring and retaining quality educators
- Providing additional supports to at-risk students
- Meeting standardized testing benchmarks
- Meeting the needs of students with disabilities
- Maintaining sports programs
- School climate

2. What should the financial priorities be over the next five years (choose only five of your highest priorities from the list)?

- Building maintenance
- Updated technology in classrooms
- Specialized Instructional Support Personnel (e.g., nurses, psychologists, social workers, counselors) to meet student needs
- The addition of rigorous courses (e.g., Advanced Placement courses)
- Small class sizes
- New textbooks

- Teacher salaries and benefits to improve recruitment and retention
- A school library
- College preparatory courses for all students
- School climate

3. What evidence do you use to evaluate the quality of education in our school (choose only five of your highest priorities from the list)?

- Presence of a school nurse
- Fine arts courses
- P.E. course
- Advanced courses in math and science (e.g., calculus and physics)
- Standardized test scores
- School climate survey results
- Teacher turnover
- Student absences
- Percent of teachers teaching out of field
- Parent engagement
- Percentage of students being suspended

*For additional information on survey development contact NEA's Research Department at [insights@nea.org](mailto:insights@nea.org).*

<sup>1</sup> Ewy, R. (2009). *Stakeholder-Driven Strategic Planning in Education: A Practical Guide for Developing and Deploying Successful Long-Range Plans*. Milwaukee, Wisconsin: ASQ Quality Press.

### 3. Analyze Survey Results

#### ABC High School Example

*During the GPS Indicators audit, your team identified a lack of rigorous courses (i.e., Honors and AP courses) and college preparatory courses as a priority. Surveys and small group discussions revealed college preparatory courses and school climate as school priorities. Due to the team’s limited capacity, the team decides to focus on college preparatory courses, only.*

After collecting all of the surveys and any data collected from small-group discussions, analyze and prioritize the results. Results will be used to develop the first draft of your school improvement plan.

## Plan—Identify the Solution(s)

The action plan is based on the prioritized data collected in the assessment phase.

### 1. Establish Targets

After setting priorities, the team should establish targets. This section enables the team to establish where they currently are in regard to the priority and where they would like to be. Target-setting will later inform the SWOT and logic model.

#### ABC High School Example

*College preparatory courses were voted as a top priority. College preparatory courses are algebra I, algebra II, geometry, trigonometry, calculus, biology, chemistry, and physics.*

Targets Sample

PRIORITIES	CURRENT STATUS	TARGETS
Percentage of high school seniors who have completed all college preparatory courses in math and science	0 percent of students have completed the complete course catalog of college prep courses	85 percent completion rate after five years
	60 percent of seniors completed algebra I, algebra II, geometry, and trigonometry	5 percent annual increase in the number of students completing math preparatory courses
	60 percent of seniors completed biology and chemistry	5 percent annual increase in the number of students completing science preparatory courses
	0 calculus and physics courses	Hire a teacher for calculus and a teacher for physics

## 2. SWOT

The SWOT (Strengths, Weaknesses, Opportunities, and Threats) analysis helps identify possible challenges your action plan may face and will inform strategy development. Information and data from your GPS audit, survey, and discussions will assist your team in filling out your SWOT grid.

**Strengths**-Characteristics that will help you achieve your objectives

**Weaknesses**-Characteristics that will limit your ability to achieve objectives

**Opportunities**-External elements that can be seized to achieve objectives

**Threats**-External elements that negatively impact your ability to achieve objectives

		-SAMPLE- SWOT ANALYSIS	
		HELPFUL	HARMFUL
<b>INTERNAL</b>	<p><b>Strengths</b></p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>▪ The school set rigorous standards for all students</li> <li>▪ Educators meet high-quality standards</li> <li>▪ Strong parent engagement</li> </ul>	<p><b>Weaknesses</b></p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>▪ Course offerings are not aligned with high student standards</li> <li>▪ Average rating on the school climate student surveys</li> <li>▪ Inactive student council</li> <li>▪ 40 percent of the school is not completing any college prep courses</li> </ul>	
<b>EXTERNAL</b>	<p><b>Opportunities</b></p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>▪ An active PTA</li> <li>▪ Well-attended school board meetings</li> </ul>	<p><b>Threats</b></p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>▪ Funding constraints</li> <li>▪ Declining school enrollment</li> </ul>	

## TOWS Analysis

The TOWS (Threats, Opportunities, Weaknesses, and Strengths) analysis is a variation of the SWOT analysis, but with more emphasis on the external environment. For some, the TOWS helps clarify their options.

**Strengths and Opportunities (S-O) Strategies**-How strengths can be used to capitalize on opportunities

**Strengths and Threats (S-T) Strategies**-How strengths can be used to mitigate threats

**Weaknesses and Opportunities (W-O) Strategies**-How opportunities can overcome weaknesses

**Weaknesses and Threats (W-T) Strategies**-How you will minimize weakness and avoid threats

<p style="text-align: center;"><b>Internal</b></p> <p style="text-align: center;"><b>External</b></p>	<p><b>Strengths</b></p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>▪ The school set rigorous standards for all students</li> <li>▪ Educators meet high-quality standards</li> <li>▪ Strong parent engagement</li> </ul>	<p><b>Weaknesses</b></p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>▪ Course offerings are not aligned with high student standards</li> <li>▪ Average rating on the school climate student surveys</li> <li>▪ Inactive student council</li> <li>▪ 40 percent of the school is not completing any college prep courses</li> </ul>
<p><b>Opportunities</b></p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>▪ An active PTA</li> <li>▪ Well-attended school board meetings</li> </ul>	<p><b>S-O Strategies</b></p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>▪ Have educators inform parents of standards</li> <li>▪ Have educators work with the board and PTA, reaffirming high standards for all students</li> </ul>	<p><b>W-O Strategies</b></p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>▪ Work with the PTA and the board to increase enrollment in current courses and achieve additional courses</li> <li>▪ Demonstrate to the board and PTA that misalignment between courses and standards has negatively impacted school performance and school climate</li> </ul>
<p><b>Threats</b></p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>▪ Funding constraints</li> <li>▪ Declining school enrollment</li> </ul>	<p><b>S-T Threats Strategies</b></p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>▪ Demonstrate that high standards require college prep courses, all of which require funding</li> <li>▪ Demonstrate that high standards and college prep courses can attract parents and positively impact school enrollment</li> </ul>	<p><b>W-T Strategies</b></p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>▪ Implement courses aligned with standards</li> <li>▪ Implementation of college prep courses may positively impact student morale</li> <li>▪ A campaign to implement college prep courses could activate the student council</li> <li>▪ A strong curriculum could positively impact enrollment</li> </ul>

## 3. Logic Model

The logic model enables your team to visualize the resources and activities needed to address priorities and achieve established targets. The logic model will serve as the foundation for your more detailed action plan. There are many variations of the logic model. The example below is one of many ways to create your logic model. A separate logic model must be created for each objective identified.

**Priority 1, Objective A: Increase enrollment in current college preparatory courses**

Priorities	Targets	Resources	Activities	Outputs	Outcomes		
					Short-Term Outcomes	Medium-Term Outcomes	Long-Term Outcomes
		<i>Resources needed to meet our objectives:</i>	<i>To address our problem or asset, we will accomplish the following activities:</i>	<i>We expect that once accomplished, these activities will produce the following evidence of service delivery:</i>	<i>We expect that if completed or ongoing, these activities will lead to the following changes in one year:</i>	<i>We expect that if completed or ongoing, these activities will lead to the following changes in two years:</i>	<i>We expect that if completed, these activities will lead to the following changes in three years:</i>
Percentage of high school seniors who have completed all college preparatory courses in math and science	85 percent completion rate after five years	Staff time Parent and stakeholder time Printing funds for informational leaflets and pledge cards	Research and survey students not currently enrolled in college preparatory courses	Attendance rates at meetings Number of administrators supportive of increased enrollment	June 2016 65 percent of seniors completed all available college preparatory courses	June 2017 70 percent of seniors completed all available college preparatory courses	June 2018 75 percent of seniors completed all available college preparatory courses
	5 percent annual increase in the number of students completing math preparatory courses  5 percent annual increase in the number of students completing science preparatory courses		Meet with parents, community, and students about the importance of taking college preparatory courses  Meet with administration and staff on plan to increase enrollment numbers  Monthly meetings with student council on enrollment	Number of pledge cards signed by students  Enrollment rates in courses			

Priority 1, Objective B: Acquire additional college preparatory courses

Priorities	Targets	Resources	Activities	Outputs	Outcomes		
					Short-Term Outcomes	Medium-Term Outcomes	Long-Term Outcomes
		<i>Resources needed to meet our objectives</i>	<i>To address our problem or asset, we will accomplish the following activities:</i>	<i>We expect that once accomplished, these activities will produce the following evidence of service delivery:</i>	<i>We expect that if completed or ongoing, these activities will lead to the following changes in one year:</i>	<i>We expect that if completed or ongoing, these activities will lead to the following changes in two years:</i>	<i>We expect that if completed, these activities will lead to the following changes in three years:</i>
Percentage of high school seniors who have completed all college preparatory courses in math and science	85 percent completion rate after five years  5 percent annual increase in the number of students completing math preparatory courses	Staff time  Parent and stakeholder time  Printing funds for informational leaflets and pledge cards	Research for presentation to the board and administrators  Meet with parents, community, and students about acquiring additional college prep courses	Attendance rate at monthly meetings  Number of pledge cards signed by all stakeholders  Number of administrators supportive of additional courses	June 2019  Additional college prep courses are added to the school catalog	June 2020  80 percent of seniors completed all college preparatory courses	June 2021  85 percent of seniors completed all college preparatory courses
	5 percent annual increase in the number of students completing science preparatory courses		Meet with administrators  Schedule stakeholder gatherings at the school board meetings and address the board  Prepare stakeholders to address the board  Monthly informational meetings with updates on the campaign to achieve college prep courses	Attendance at the presentation for the board  Number of supportive stakeholders at board meetings			

#### 4. Detailed Action Plan

At this point, your team should have completed the following:

- Identified gaps between your school and a great public school
- Met with and surveyed stakeholders on school priorities and challenges
- Categorized and prioritized the feedback received from the audit, survey, and small group discussions
- Established targets for identified school priorities
- Identified strengths, weaknesses, opportunities, and threats (SWOT)
- Developed a logic model based on targets, priorities, and the SWOT

Now that you have a solid foundation, write up your final plan. The final plan should include detailed timelines, milestones, and assigned duties.

#### Sample Action Plan

GOAL: COLLEGE-READY STUDENTS						
Objectives	Activities	Timeline	Roles	Strategies	Measures	Resources Needed
Increase enrollment in current college preparatory courses	Meet with administration and staff on plan to increase enrollment numbers	9/2015	Mary-Supervisor	Surveys	Number of administrators voicing support	Assistance from school staff
	Research and survey students not currently enrolled in college preparatory courses	10/2015	Brenda-Research and surveys Tom-Logistics	Provide information via meetings Solicit feedback via meetings	Number of staff voicing support Number of meetings held	Assistance from stakeholders \$100 for leaflets \$200 for pledge cards
	Meet with parents, community, and students about the importance of taking college preparatory courses	2/2016-12/2022	Kate-Liaison to parents Marcus-Liaison to community members		Survey response rate Meeting attendance	\$40 for refreshments for each meeting with parents
	Meet monthly with student council on enrollment	8/2016-12/2022	Bruce-Liaison to administration Kelly-Liaison to student council Cory-Liaison to staff		Number of pledge cards signed by students Enrollment rates in courses	

Chart continued on next page

**GOAL: COLLEGE-READY STUDENTS**

Objectives	Activities	Timeline	Roles	Strategies	Measures	Resources Needed
Acquire additional college preparatory courses	Meet with administrators about acquiring additional courses	1/2017	Mary-Supervisor	Provide information via presentations and meetings	Number of administrators and staff supportive of additional courses	Assistance from school staff Assistance from stakeholders
	Meet with parents, community, and students about acquiring additional college prep courses	2/2017-5/2020	Brenda-Research and surveys Tom-Logistics	Solicit information via feedback	Number of meetings	\$100 for leaflets \$200 for pledge cards
	Research for presentation to the board and administrators	8/2017	Kate-Liaison to parents Marcus-Liaison to community members		Attendance rate at monthly meetings	\$40 for refreshments for each meeting with parents
	Prepare stakeholders to address the board	9/2017-5/2020	Bruce-Liaison to administration		Number of pledge cards signed by all stakeholders	
	Schedule stakeholder gatherings at the school board meetings and address the board	10/2017-6/2020	Kelly-Liaison to student council Cory-Liaison to staff		Attendance at the board meetings	
	Monthly informational meetings with updates on the campaign to achieve college prep courses	11/2017-7/2020			Number of supportive stakeholders at the board meeting	
					Number of courses implemented	

## A Final Word

Transforming your school will not be easy; it will require a dedicated team, resources, and a commitment to work with all stakeholders at every step. Depending on your particular school and the priorities identified by all stakeholders, including your team, the school transformation process can take anywhere from two to 10 years. Although arduous, the process will change your school into a great public school and provide the high-quality education all students deserve.

Let your school be the example—the lighthouse that guides other schools toward greatness. Only when all stakeholders work together, can we eliminate inequities, close the skills gap, and elevate achievement for all students.

For more information, please contact Angelica Castañon in NEA’s Education Policy and Practice Department at [acastanon@nea.org](mailto:acastanon@nea.org).

