I. Description of Terms of Reference

Creating a detailed Terms of Reference (TOR) is a critical part of any project. TOR is quite frequently used in business and any planning endeavor. Terms of Reference (TOR) are detailed in a document outlining the purpose of the project or group, how the group will be structured, and how the work will be done. It functions as an a) an internal memorandum of understanding for the group or project team b) links the group or project team to broader systems work (e.g. collaborative work, policy change, regulatory revisions).

TOR can facilitate the work of the project team or work group, because it establishes common ground and a common understanding of why a group has been formed and what is expected. It is a proactive way to ensure that there is agreement about important dimensions of both the work to be done and the processes for doing the work. Such agreement creation through the development of the TOR and in the absence of actual work or issues, helps the group raise difficult issues in the abstract and talk more openly about diverse opinions to reach consensus.

- If the document is actively used and referenced throughout the life of the project or the work of the team it can:
• Help keep the project or group on track or on “mission” (e.g. “I don’t think that’s in our scope of work, let’s see what we said in the TOR. Do we want to change the TOR?”).

• Serve as an aid to troubleshooting a project (e.g. “Are we still aligned on values and way of work, do we have the authority, people, resources we need.”)

• Serve as a point of reference when group dynamics are bumpy (e.g. “I wonder if we should revisit our agreed upon way of work, we said…..now I see…So have we changed our way of work or scope of work or have we strayed from our roles/responsibilities, values”).

• Ensure continuity and focus of the work as project or team membership changes over time and across administrations (e.g. “Welcome to the group, here is some orientation material that will help you join us”).

The following components are often addressed:

• Vision
• Goals and Objectives
• Scope and Boundaries (what the work is and is not, when are we done)
• Roles and Responsibilities of individuals (who participates in what ways)
• Linking Communication Protocols to accomplish service and policy alignment (with whom do we communicate, how, and how often and for what purpose)
• Resources available to the project
• Authority
• Deliverables
• Implementation Plans

Not always addressed, but useful:

• Values and ways of work that the group will abide by throughout the project (e.g. consensus, respect, embracing of diverse opinions, agreement on how conflicts will be resolved, requirements of who may substitute on the team).

II. An Example: Common Principles of Effective Practice (CPEP) - State Leadership Team

Terms of Reference

The purpose of the CPEP State Leadership Team’s “Terms of Reference” is to establish common ground and understanding of why the group has been formed and what is expected. It is this protocol that will be used to ensure that there is agreement about important dimensions of the project. The Terms of Reference will build Practice-Policy feedback loops and help groups talk more openly about diverse opinions and reach consensus. The Terms of Reference will help the CPEP State Leadership Team address alignment issues and allocation of resources (time, personnel, funding). It will be used to introduce new group members and new directors and staff to the roles and functions of the CPEP State Leadership Team. This document will be referenced on a quarterly basis and will be revised as more efficient ways of functioning emerge.

A. Vision

The vision of the CPEP State Leadership Team is to create a statewide infrastructure that will support a common, coherent implementation of teaching and learning practices that will accelerate the learning of ALL students and staff. The state will rely on the Common Principles of Effective Practice (the “What”) and Key Components of Implementation (the “How”) to support this infrastructure.
The What…

- Defined and Measurable Goals and Outcomes
- Data Driven Decision-making
- Evidence Based Practices
- Tiered Levels of Support that Accelerates the Learning of ALL Students
- Implementation of Instruction / Intervention as Intended
- Culturally Responsive Teaching and Learning
- Aligned with PreK-12 Academic State and Local Academic Standards
- Parent and Community Engagement

The How…

- Stages of Implementation
- Core Implementation Components
- Leadership at ALL Levels
- Coherent Alignment of Policies and Procedures to Support Implementation

B. Goals and Objectives

The CPEP State Leadership Team will work toward meeting the following goals and objectives:

- Communicate with all stakeholders to gather and disseminate information regarding the state’s Common Principles of Effective Practice (CPEP) and the Key Components of Implementation
- Support cross-divisional collaboration among all divisions of the Department of Education and among all education stakeholder groups
- Build capacity of school districts on the Science of Implementation
- Assist school districts in developing and sustaining multi-level communication feedback loops by appropriately modeling the types of conversations that will support and move forward the effective implementation of an evidence-based practice.
- Support school districts as they implement evidence-based practices with fidelity

C. Scope and Boundaries:

The CPEP State Leadership Team is considered to be:

- an active working group;
- a teaching and learning group;
- a multi-disciplinary group with members from a variety of education entities inside and outside of the Department of Education;
- a team that will link and reciprocate with other education advocacy groups; and
- will communicate and disseminate information within the education group they represent.

Members of the CPEP State Leadership team can be characterized as:

- Change agents
- Individuals from across various educational organizations and entities with a common focus on improving outcomes for ALL state youth

The CPEP State Leadership Team will:

- Acknowledge the evolution of change that may occur as the journey to scale-up and build capacity occurs
- Document a historical account of the journey
- Maintain a focus on systemic change (e.g., at the district, state and regional levels)
- Maintain a focus on evidence-based practices that are scalable (practices that have sufficient scientific validation and practical verification to warrant the large-scale investment needed to transform these practices into standard practice)
- Foster connections and collaborative efforts among statewide educational stakeholders
- Make decisions based on data and models the use of effective and efficient use of data in order to make informed instructional decisions
- Function as a conduit to communicate information to others who are not on the CPEP State Leadership Team
- Maintain a problem – solving, solution – oriented focus
• Function as a link in the feedback cycle to facilitate Policy Enhanced Practice (PEP) and Practice Informed Policy (PIP)

The CPEP State Leadership Team does not:
• Participate in functions outside the purview of the state Department of Education vision/mission
• Engage in, intentional or inadvertently, efforts to subvert, sabotage, undermine effective projects and efforts
• Purport to doing it all or have the answer to everything
• Act with unilateral authority
• Act as a gatekeeper, compliance monitor or sole expert
• Endorse or advocate or mandate various practices

The CPEP State Leadership Team values:
• School and district time and efforts
• A harmonious message as evidenced by ascribing to the Common Principles of Effective Practice and Key Components of Implementation
• Active participation and efficient utilization of the partnership with the National SISEP Center
• An emphasis on building capacity for statewide implementation of effective practices
• The perceptions of multiple stakeholders including parents, district and school staff, community and state level organizations and members of diverse cultural and disability groups
• Expertise of those who may provide guidance based on research and experience

D. Roles and Responsibilities
The CPEP State Leadership Team will:
• Stay current with any new or impending state policy change and implications with respect to the scalability to align them with the state’s Common Principles of Effective Practice and the Key Components of Implementation
• Take PEP (Policy Enhanced Practice) – PIP (Policy Informed Practice) issues “back” to various constituencies/departments to create broader understanding and “forward” to other decision-makers for review and resolution
• Move from parallel work to integration – how to build coherence across and among initiatives (finding points of overlap or intersection)
• Prioritize the PIP (Practice Informed Policy) issues for resolution – and aligning issues and solutions to appropriate levels
• Be vigilant about sustaining Practice-Policy feedback loops
• Work to align multiple initiatives
• Identify and work to solve adaptive challenges
• Support member organizations as they work toward the delivery of a common message. Member organizations may include:
  » Department of Education
  » Nonprofits focused on education
  » The State’s Association of School Administrators
  » Educational Cooperative Service Units
  » National Association of Elementary School Principals
  » The state university systems
  » The State’s Staff Development Council
  » The State’s Association for Supervision and Curriculum Development
E. Communication Protocols and Pathways:

The following protocol will be used regarding referral of issues that are not within the purview of the CPEP State Leadership Team or individuals on the CPEP State Leadership Team:

- Refer issues to relevant Deputy Commissioner(s) via CPEP State Leadership Team for resolution at Deputy Commissioner level
- Develop guidelines for ‘filtering’ types of issues requiring Deputy Commissioner and/or Executive Leadership Team attention
- State Transformation Specialists:
  » Explore and get Deputy Commissioner agreement about bringing issues to the Executive Leadership Team when they are not able to be resolved at the division Director level
  » Document information about issues and the process followed
  » Facilitate communication across levels
  » Report progress to CPEP State Leadership Team as appropriate as well as back to District level (e.g. ensure that the various ‘levels’ are aware of the ongoing work and/or timeframes).
  » Provide information and support to the Deputy Commissioner and Executive Leadership Team (e.g. context, additional information, meetings, research)

F. Resources Available to the Project

- Time for the CPEP State Leadership and Regional Implementation Team members to attend meetings, engage in communication outside the meetings, take on tasks, vet material
- Time from the SISEP Center

G. Deliverables

The following resources and tools are being developed to support district efforts in effective implementation of an evidence-based practice.

- Resource Mapping Tool
- Needs Assessment Tool
- Implementation Checklists
- Selecting An Evidence-Based Practice Tool
III. Terms of Reference Template

Vision and Mission for the Work Together

Scope and Objectives
  - Expected Outcomes and Deliverables

Boundaries and Limitations (what the work is and is not, when and “if” we are done)

Authority, Accountability and Reporting Requirements

Linking Communication Protocols for Alignment (with whom do we communicate, how, and how often and for what purpose)

Roles and Functions of individuals (who participates in what ways)
  - Leadership
  - Term
  - Membership
  - Orientation for New Members

Resources available to the group or project (e.g. administrative support, time, funding)

Decision-making process (e.g. consensus, majority, unanimous, X members must be present to make a decision)

Values and Ways of Work (e.g. decisions will or will not be revisited, participants can or cannot send a representative in their place)
IV. Linking Communication Protocol Worksheet

**General Purposes**

The overall function served by linking communication protocols is to develop a feedback process for creating a hospitable policy, funding, and operational environment for new initiatives or systems changes.

The specific purposes of linking communication protocols are to:

- Communicate progress and celebrate success throughout the system
- Report systemic barriers that are preventing or hindering implementation and
  » Should be resolved by one of the groups
  » Need to be moved ‘up the line’ to the group that can best address the barrier
- Report on actions taken related to past issues
- Revisit past decisions and agreements periodically to ensure that solutions are still functional

In promoting system alignment, you may be developing a ‘chain’ of protocols from the practice level to the state level or you may be developing protocols between and among partners in a collaborative group. Depending on a number of factors (e.g. how new the relationships are, how cohesive the groups are, how much a common purpose is shared), it may take one or several meetings to work out the first draft of the protocols. After the protocols have been tried out a couple of times, the process should be evaluated for satisfaction and functionality and then adjusted. Below are some questions that can be helpful in guiding the discussion.

**Guiding Questions for Developing Linking Communication Protocols**

Names of Groups to be linked:

Rationale for creating linking communication protocols (e.g. overall purpose):

What types of issues/items need to be communicated to and from each group?

From: (group A) To: (group B)

From: (group B) To: (group A)

What types of issues do not need to be communicated?

How often will you schedule feedback sessions/events to review issues (e.g. monthly, every 2 months)? Why that interval?

How and who will gather, review, and prioritize issues?

Who is charged with providing information to the other group(s) (e.g. which person or role)? ...in what format (verbally in person, in writing, email)?

Preparatory work to initiate the protocol and process for final agreement creation.

Target Date to initiate:
V. Example: Linking Communication Protocol for a Multi-Site Implementation of a New Practice Model

Practice Level to State Team to Practice Level

Practice Level Communication Team:
A practice-level communication team has been formed consisting of one teacher from each of the three implementing schools and their respective principals plus the external coach. This team will meet once a month in person, with the exception of school X who will join by web cam. The teacher and principal from each implementing site will raise issues in the group meeting that they consider to be systemic and should be fed to the state level team. These issues should include issues related to training, coaching, data access and use, administrative policies, state regulations. They should not include any issues that are related to a specific individual or quality indicators at an individual agency. Discussion at the meeting might result in a decision that a particular issue is not systemic and should be referred back to the agency for resolution.

Expected outcomes related to the meeting:

- Identify at least one common policy or program guideline that is facilitating the work and needs to be communicated and continued.
- Identify and then prioritize policies, program guidelines, or resource issues that are presenting systemic barriers (e.g. impacting all or most agencies) to effectively implementing the model of care.
- For each barrier, the practice level communications team will endeavor to make at least one recommendation for resolution.
- Facilitators, barriers, and recommendations will be documented in writing and emailed to the Chair of the State Level Communication Team.
- The Chair of the Practice Level Communication Team will present the issues to the State Team at the State Team’s next regularly scheduled monthly meeting.

State Level Communication Team:
The State Level Communication Team is the state management team. Practice level feedback is welcome and viewed as a necessary component of creating an aligned and functional system. The State Level Team Chair will receive and distribute all emails from the Practice Level Team to all State Team members prior to the monthly meeting. The State Level Team will reserve 30 minutes at each meeting for discussion with the Practice Level Chair and other invited practice level individuals in order to discuss and review issues.

Resolution may or may not be able to occur at that meeting. If more work, information, or study is needed the State Level Team will communicate its plan for dealing with the issue in a timely manner via email to the Chair of the Practice Level Communications Team prior to the next monthly meeting.

The State Level Team will review and reflect on all issues raised and will report the status of each issue every 6 months at the State Management Team meeting. Data will include # of issues raise during the last six months and the status of each.

Summary data will include:

- Percent of issues still under consideration,
- Percent of issues resolved to facilitate the work,
- Percent of issues that were not able to be resolved (e.g. requires legislative or other regulatory action beyond the group’s control) at this time,
- Percent of issues referred on and person accountable for follow-up.

The data summary will be the topic of a meeting and three representatives of the Practice Level Communications team will be invited to attend that meeting.
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