

# Measurement Planning in School Mental Health System Improvement

**Purpose:** A measurement plan helps teams to answer the question, “how will we know if the change is an improvement?” Every change made to a system will not lead to improvement; teams must continuously use data to check whether changes are making the intended impact and inform the improvement journey. Improvement measurement plans rely on practical data sources that are embedded in everyday work, collected frequently, and framed in language that is natural and makes sense to those collecting the data (Byrk 2015).

**Framing:** DPI’s [Roadmap for School Mental Health Improvement](#) outlines five steps for increasing the quality of a school mental health system: commitment, assessment, planning, implementation, and reflection. Measurement plans are an important tool for several steps in the Roadmap. For example, in the assessment step, teams collect baseline data on the needs and current functioning of the system. These measures support development of the driver diagram and may become part of the measurement plan to assess progress towards outcomes and drivers over time. During the Implementation step, teams use the measurement plan to assess the impact of changes made during PDSA cycles. During the reflection step, teams use data collected throughout the improvement process to evaluate the impact, celebrate successes, and plan for future improvement work.

**Application:** Teams can use the [Driver Diagram](#) to articulate their theory of improvement toward prioritized change targets in their school system. The measurement plan helps teams test their theory of improvement along the way and provides data-informed signals of when and how the theory of improvement and improvement efforts might need to be adjusted. Table 1 explores measure types used in a comprehensive measurement plan, the corresponding part of the driver diagram it can be used to measure, and examples of ways to collect each type of data.

## Equity Check

- How can data collection burden on staff be minimized, shared, or incentivized by reducing or reallocating other duties?
- How have we communicated the goals and outcomes of these measurements?
- Whose voices are included in the measurement plan?
- What is the plan to measure and monitor any unintended impacts of our improvement efforts? (Hinnant-Crawford 2020)



**Table 1. Types of Measures in a Measurement Plan**

| Measure Type  | Corresponding Driver Diagram Component  | Data Collection Examples   |
|---|---|--|
| <p><b>Outcome measures</b> assess progress towards the overall improvement goal or aim (Bennett et. Al 2022). These measures are not collected until well after the change process has started. They provide information on where the system needs to improve, but not how to improve it.</p>   | <p>AIM statement</p>                    | <p>Annual or biannual survey<br/>(EX: Youth Risk Behaviors Survey, School Climate Survey, Social Emotional Learning Competency Assessment, attendance, grades, etc.)</p>   |
| <p><b>Driver Measures</b> predict progress towards the aim before the team has collected outcome measures (Hinnant-Crawford 2020). Driver measures are collected more frequently than outcome measures but less frequently than process measures.</p>   | <p>Primary and secondary drivers</p>    | <p>Focus groups or <a href="#">empathy interviews</a><br/>Listening campaigns<br/>Fishbowls or panel discussions<br/>Structured observations<br/>Home/classroom/community visits<br/>Shadow a student, teacher, or other implementer<br/>Student-led community walks</p> |
| <p><b>Process measures</b> assess how a change is being implemented (Bennett et. Al 2022). Process measures are collected frequently, so teams can detect variations from what is intended and make adjustments in future Plan, Do, Study, Act (PDSA) cycles.</p>   | <p>Change ideas and tests of change</p> | <p>Short reflection survey<br/>Exit ticket<br/>Plus/Delta reflection<br/>Conversation with staff during recess/ lunch duty<br/>Color-coded implementation calendar<br/>End of meeting accomplishment checklist</p>   |
| <p><b>Balancing Measures</b> ensure that introducing a change to one part of a system does not disrupt or create an unintended impact on other parts of the system (Hinnant-Crawford 2020). -For example, introducing a new program or practice could lead to staff compassion fatigue or an increase of unnecessary mental health referrals.</p> | <p>Entire driver diagram</p>            | <p>Reflective compassion resilience activity during staff meeting<br/>Student or parent engagement survey<br/>Office discipline referral tracking<br/>Log of referrals to mental health team that are unnecessary or are mismatched to student needs</p>                 |

**Getting Started:** Teams may wish to reference the data collection examples in Table 1 and the measurement plan example in Table 2 for ideas of how to get started. Teams can record their plan in the plan template, Table 3

**Table 2. Measurement Plan Example**

| Type of Measurement | What is measured  | Tool or Measure  | Timeline                          | Person(s) responsible                  | Equity Check  |
|---------------------|---|--|-----------------------------------|--|---|
| Outcome Measures    | <b>Aim statement</b><br>By June 2025, the number of LGBTQ+ students who indicate that they feel like they belong at school will increase by 20% as measured by the YRBS.  | Youth Risk Behaviors Survey  | Every two years                   | Director of student services           | *Need to survey a representative sample   |
| Driver Measures     | <b>Primary driver</b><br>Staff support of students  | School Climate Survey  | Annually                          | Mental Health Team                     | *Need to communicate the purpose of the data collection to students and staff                                       |
|                     | <b>Secondary driver of focus</b><br>Increased student voice   | Spreadsheet with lists of students participating in feedback opportunities                                 | Monthly                           | Mental Health Team                     | *Need to consider the diversity of voice included   |
| Process Measures    | <b>Change idea:</b> Implement a process for gaining student feedback about Increasing belonging.<br><b>Test:</b><br>Implement a new belonging activity in class and test an exit ticket strategy for gaining feedback for one classroom | Student exit tickets   | Weekly                            | Mental health team, classroom Teachers | *Need to measure unintended impacts of the change on teacher time, fatigue related to implementing the new strategy |
| Balancing Measures  | The team hypothesized that adding this strategy might contribute to staff fatigue   | Short conversation with implementing teachers during lunch or recess duty about how the strategy is going. | After new activity is implemented | Mental health team                     | *Check that this data collection strategy doesn't add to teacher fatigue  |

**Table 3. Measurement Plan Template**

| <b>Type of Measurement</b> | <b>What is Measured</b>                 | <b>Tool or Measure</b> | <b>Timeline</b> | <b>Person(s) Responsible</b> | <b>Equity Check</b> |
|----------------------------|---|------------------------|-----------------|------------------------------|---------------------|
| Outcome Measures           | <b>Aim statement</b>                    |                        |                 |                              |                     |
| Driver Measures            | <b>Primary driver</b>                   |                        |                 |                              |                     |
|                            | <b>Secondary driver of focus</b>        |                        |                 |                              |                     |
| Process Measures           | <b>Change idea:</b><br><br><b>Test:</b> |                        |                 |                              |                     |
| Balancing Measures         |   |                        |                 |                              |                     |

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Bryk, A. S., Gomez, L. M., Grunow, A., & LeMahieu, P. G. 2015. *Learning to Improve: How America's Schools Can Get Better at Getting Better*. Cambridge, MA: Harvard Education Press.

Hinnant-Crawford, B. N. 2020. *Improvement Science in Education*. Myers Education Press.