



The Science of Success in Schools

As educators, we are constantly in a state of continuous improvement. Each new school year comes with a strong desire to increase our positive impact on student learning and with it new initiatives or change agendas. Unfortunately, between 25 and 50% of our efforts yield the desired impact which can feel defeating (Damschroder, et al., 2009; Gottfredson & Gottfredson, 2002). Fortunately, implementation science gives us the tools to increase our likelihood of impact with a much higher rate of success (Duda & Wilson, 2018; Lyon, 2016).

What is implementation science?

Implementation science is the use of deliberate strategies to facilitate the uptake of an evidence-based practice or program into regular use by educators to achieve a desired result while considering the changes that need to occur within the system to successfully implement the innovation as intended and sustain it (Duda & Wilson, 2018; Lyon, 2016). By purposefully planning and fostering the necessary conditions for the new practice to become routinized, educators can close the gap between what works and the results achieved by students.

How do I engage in implementation science?

Figure 1 represents the formula for achieving success in leading initiatives that yield the desired impact. An **evidence-based practice or program** represents the selection of the proven practice, program, curriculum or other intervention, including what it looks like in practice to get the results. The **implementation methods** represent the aspects needed to support the implementers in mastering the new practice such as professional learning, coaching, time and resources along with the appropriate monitoring protocols and adjustments based on implementation efforts. The **enabling contexts** are the policies, procedures, and practices needed for the change to happen.

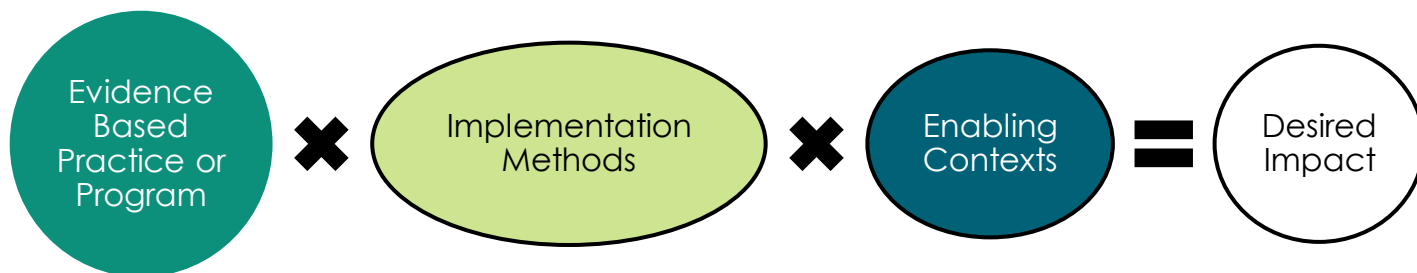


Figure 1: The Formula for the Science of Success in Schools

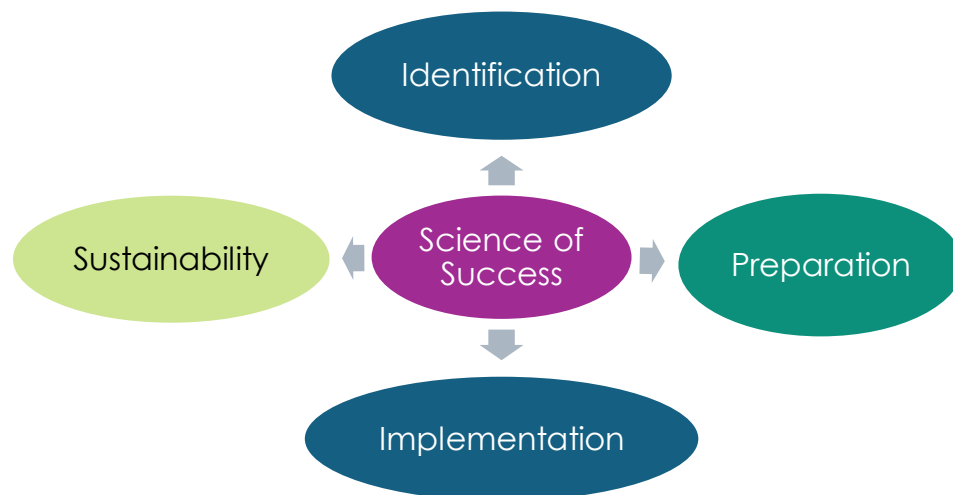
(Adapted from Fixsen, Blasé, Duda, Naoom, & Van Dyke, 2010)



The Cycle of Implementation with Impact

For the formula to work, there are four phases in implementing a new practice to yield impact: 1) identification, preparation, implementation, and sustainability.

1. **Identification.** In the first stage, district and/or school leadership identify the change needed and the compelling why, select the evidence-based practice or program to address the change as well as identify what it takes to implement it, anticipate the potential barriers, develop champions for the change, and set about establishing system-wide buy in.
2. **Preparation.** In the second stage, district and/or school leadership provide the necessary professional learning and/or resources needed to achieve the change, identify early adopters to understand what may need to be adapted, and train leaders on the change effort.
3. **Implementation.** In the third stage, district and/or school leadership routinely monitor implementation and impact, adjust supports and adapt to address unanticipated barriers, provide job-embedded coaching or consultation to provide ongoing support, share ways the practice can be tailored or adapted for local contexts as well as which aspects must be maintained to preserve integrity of the practice, and share out success points.
4. **Sustainability.** In the final stage, district and/or school leadership continue to monitor implementation and student learning results, communicate the impact of the practice, engage in continuous review and adjustments, as well as consider scaling the practice to more schools or classrooms, if needed.





References

- Damschroder, L. J., Aron, D. C., Keith, R. E., Kirsh, S. R., Alexander, J. A., & Lowery, J. C. (2009). Fostering implementation of health services research findings into practice: a consolidated framework for advancing implementation science. *Implementation science*, 4(1), 50.
- Duda, M. A., & Wilson, B. A. (2018). Implementation science 101: A brief overview. *Perspectives on Language and Literacy*, 44(4), 11-19.
- Fixsen, D. L., Blase, K. A., Duda, M. A., Naoom, S. F., & Van Dyke, M. (2010). Implementation of evidence-based treatments for children and adolescents: Research findings and their implications for the future. In J. R. Weisz & A. E. Kazdin (Eds.), *Evidence-based psychotherapies for children and adolescents* (2nd ed., pp. 435–450). New York, NY: Guilford Press.
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- Lyon, A. R. (2016). Implementation science and practice in the education sector. *Substance Abuse & Mental Health Services Administration*. Retrieved on April, 28, 2025 from <https://education.uw.edu/sites/default/files/Implementation%20Science%20Issue%20Brief%20072617.pdf>

Resources for More Information

Pizzuto, J., & Carney, S. (2024). *Implement with IMPACT: A Strategic Framework for Leading School and District Initiatives*. Solution Tree. 555 North Morton Street, Bloomington, IN 47404.

SISEP Active Implementation Hub <https://implementation.fpg.unc.edu/>

Video Series from Melanie Barwick

- Implementation in Schools <https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=XdfPmL4MuIY>
- Implementation of EBPs <https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=gciSmD0s5nw>
- Fidelity and Implementation <https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=n0fQxh74OOk>
- Implementation Teams <https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=kmegTINFoVmU>
- Coaching and Implementation <https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=h-tXfp9fanM>