Carnegie Foundation
for the Advancement of Teaching

AIM STATEMENTS

The aim statement answers the first essential question of improvement: *What specifically are we trying to accomplish?* It is a concise statement of what the improvement community has joined together to achieve.

Useful aim statements **clearly define success** for the improvement effort by specifying:

- *What will be improved?* (clear, operational definitions)
- *How much?* (measureable, specific numerical goals)
- *By when?* (time frame)
- *For whom?* (target population)

MODEL FOR IMPROVEMENT

What specifically are we trying to accomplish?

What changes might we introduce and why?

How will we know that a change is an improvement?

ACT | PLAN
STUDY | DO

SCOPING TO AN AIM STATEMENT

Aim statements **scope** an improvement effort, selecting what and where improvement resources will be focused. The scope of the aspirations should be appropriate given the resources and timeframe of the effort. Sometimes this involves selecting an initial feasible target on a longer journey to a broader goal. When you find yourself with improvement aspirations that are not aligned with currently-available time, capacity, and resources, options include:

- *Focus on a high-leverage aspect of the problem*
  - Select a particular process or subsystem
  - Select high-leverage points
- *Focus on a specific target population*
  - Select a subset of sites or schools
  - Select a specific group of students (i.e., grade-level, demographic group, etc.)

Aim statements represent the objective or next destination for the improvement community. Therefore they must also represent a goal that is **compelling** and worth organizing around. Aims should be developed with and endorsed by those who experience the problem and will be directly involved in working to solve it. In selecting an aim statement, the impact on those experiencing the problem should be evident and it should represent an accomplishment that is worthy and capable of sustaining the attention of the necessary stakeholders. How the aim is developed and shared will have a large impact on whether it is collectively owned.

EXAMPLES OF AIM STATEMENTS

1. Reclaim the mathematical lives for 10,000 developmental math students by May 2016.
2. Improve by 30% the retention of first-year teachers by June 2014.
3. Increase the percentage of 9th grade students who are on-track to graduate from 60% to 90% by June 2017.

Langley, G., Moen, R., Nolan, K., Nolan, T., Norman, C., and Provost, L. The Improvement Guide: a practical approach to enhancing organizational performance. 2nd Edition. San Francisco: Jossey-Bass, 2009.