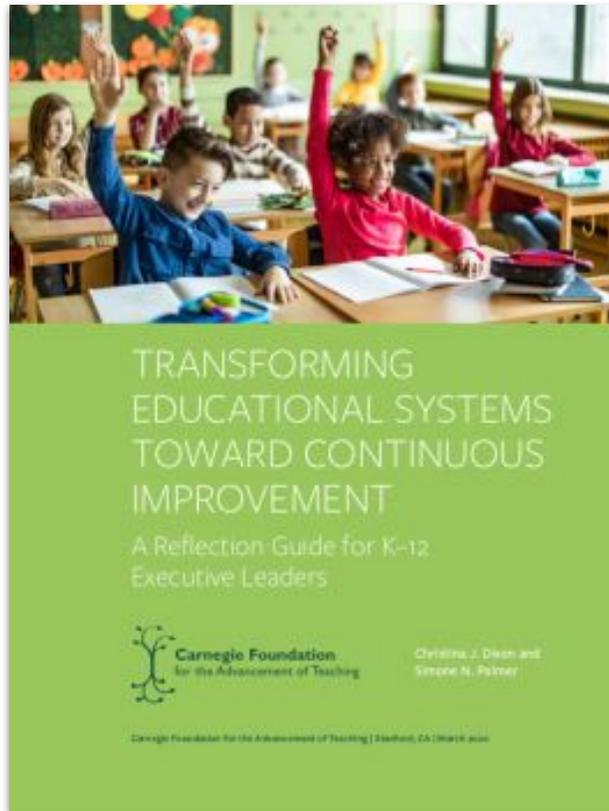# System Levers Toolkit:
Tools for Change

A companion resource to

Transforming Educational Systems Toward Continuous Improvement
A Reflection Guide for K-12 Executive Leaders

Carnegie Foundation
for the Advancement of Teaching

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Leading System Transformation

Transforming Educational Systems Toward Continuous Improvement: A Reflection Guide for K-12 Executive Leaders summarizes the findings of a Carnegie Foundation project to understand how executive leaders in education transform their organizations to be capable of producing new levels of system performance through the use of improvement science principles. The guide describes the key dispositions, core practices, and levers of transformation used by executive leaders. Within each of these categories, vital elements of successful executive leadership of such a transformation are identified. Each element includes a description accompanied by an illustration drawn from the experience of an executive leader. Some of these elements may be familiar, but others are likely to be new or offer "stretch goals" for leadership practice.

Key Dispositions
- GROWTH MINDSET
- CURIOSITY, HUMILITY, AND VULNERABILITY
- WELCOMING UNCERTAINTY
- SCIENTIFIC REASONING
- SYSTEMS THINKING

Core Practices
- LIVE THE IMPROVEMENT PRINCIPLES
- GET PROXIMATE TO THE WORK
- DEMONSTRATE COMPASSION
- BE A LEAD LEARNER

System Levers
- PROMOTE RADICAL ALIGNMENT
- BUILD AN IMPROVEMENT CULTURE
- DEVELOP EVERYONE'S IMPROVEMENT CAPABILITIES
- INVEST IN IMPROVEMENT INFRASTRUCTURE

Few leaders in our field routinely incorporate all elements into how they lead, and learning to lead improvement, like improvement itself, is a never-ending journey. For this reason, each category concludes with questions to stimulate reflection and deeper learning to support leaders in self-discovering opportunities for changing their own thinking and behavior to advance continuous improvement in their own contexts.

The leadership categories and elements described in the guide are not meant to represent a menu of choices. Just as elements of a system can't be improved in isolation, the elements of leadership are unlikely to produce transformational results if enacted individually without attention to the whole.

It is highly recommended that you read the reflection guide and complete both the System Leader Toolkit: Tool for Reflection and the System Leader Toolkit: Tools for Growth before using this System Lever Toolkit: Tools for Change. Completing those first steps will help prepare you and optimize the value of this toolkit.

Introduction to Tools for Change

System Levers: Tools for Change includes two tools - a **SWOT Analysis** and the **Living Leadership for System Transformation Activity.** As a companion resource to the to the publication *[Transforming Educational Systems Toward Continuous Improvement: A Reflection Guide for K-12 Executive Leaders](#)*, these tools help system-level leaders recognize opportunities in their organization and leverage their strengths to move their system toward positive change. The SWOT Analysis helps leaders and their teams understand their organization's current state related to continuous improvement and identify promising levers of change while the Living Leadership for System Transformation Activity supports leaders to plan actions from that analysis, guiding individual leaders to integrate the elements of leadership described in the reflection guide to drive targeted change in their system. While these tools are most powerful when used together, they can still be effective if implemented separately.

The **SWOT analysis** is best completed as a team in order to ensure a robust picture of the organization built from multiple sources of input. The analysis prompts system-level leaders and their teams to answer the question: *What are the organization's strengths, weaknesses, opportunities, and threats related to its evolution toward a system that is capable of continuously improving?* This process highlights assets as well as critical issues, both internal and external, that are impacting their system's current capacity for continuous improvement. Leaders and their teams can identify levers of change that emerge from the analysis and align their practice and decision making to advance their organization's capacity for improvement.

The **Living Leadership for System Transformation Activity** enables individual leaders to practice applying an integrated approach to enacting change in their system. This tool walks leaders through a process in which they identify key dispositions and select core practices to draw from in order to strengthen a specific system lever in their own context. This exercise helps leaders adopt a way of thinking about the interconnected nature of the dispositions, practices and system levers and guides them into an expression of commitment: *"I will leverage my strengths in [disposition] and enact [core practices] to impact/improve [system lever] in [my context]."*

There are specific instructions for each of the tools on the next few pages. You will also find templates that can be used to conduct the SWOT Analysis and a worksheet for the Living Leadership for System Transformation Activity. Reflection questions are also provided to help you distill your learning and determine what additional inquiry or actions you might pursue

Instructions for Conducting the SWOT Analysis

Objective: To identify critical issues and opportunities related to advancing system wide continuous improvement in an organization.

What is a SWOT analysis?
A SWOT analysis is a process of reflecting on information you've gathered to extract the elements that are most important for informing the strategic direction of your organization or initiative. This analysis prompts you to identify four facets of your current situation:
- **S**trengths - what your organization does well, assets, competitive advantages
- **W**eaknesses - where your organization struggles, liabilities, relative disadvantages
- **O**pportunities - conditions that favor your organization or could help it improve its situation
- **T**hreats - Risks, obstacles, unfavorable conditions

Strengths and Weaknesses are internal to your organization. Opportunities and Threats exist in your external environment.

Why do a SWOT analysis?
A SWOT analysis can help you and your team identify critical issues and inform decisions for your organization or a specific project. It is a tool that helps synthesize your understanding of your organization's current state.

How do I do a SWOT analysis?

1. <u>Consider the following question</u>:
   - *What are our organization's strengths, weaknesses, opportunities and threats related to transforming our system to continuously improve?*

2. <u>Prepare for your SWOT analysis meeting</u>
   - Invite at least 3 team members with knowledge related to your focus question
   - Gather materials: markers, post its, white board or poster-sized paper divided into quadrants labeled "S, W, O, T" (or use the template provided).
   - Collect and share relevant resources and information about the current system state with team members prior to the meeting (for example, *Transforming Education Systems Toward Continuous Improvement*, learning from system investigation, data regarding current and past improvement efforts, etc.)
   - Create a meeting agenda and send it to team members (see sample agenda on the next page).

3. <u>Facilitate the SWOT analysis meeting</u>.

4. <u>Reflect on your learning</u> and consider the implications for your strategy.

Sample SWOT Analysis Team Meeting Agenda

Time	Activity
5 min	**Welcome**, check-in & agenda review
5 min	**Explain** the purpose of a SWOT analysis
5 min	**Describe** each of the categories (Strengths, Weaknesses, Opportunities, Threats) and the focus question for the SWOT analysis
10 min	**Flare:** Brainstorm ideas for each category ● For each category, individually silent write one idea per post-it *Tips for activity:* ● *Keep a brisk pace—assign a timekeeper* ● *Don't judge—respect all ideas* ● *Group similar ideas as they are added* ● *If you get stuck, revisit the focus question, review relevant information or look to the reflection guide to stimulate ideas.*
10 min	**Share:** As a team, review the ideas in each category and group similar ideas. Paraphrase each group of ideas into a single idea.
20 min	**Focus:** Come to consensus on the 4-6 most important ideas to address
20 min	**Reflect** as a team on the following questions: ● What stands out to you about your SWOT analysis? ● Where do your strengths and opportunities align? (These are your greatest advantages) ● Where do your weaknesses and threats align? (These are your greatest risks) ● What insights were revealed in this process that can inform the priority areas of focus for your organization's transformation? ● How might discoveries from the SWOT analysis inform your leadership team's strategic planning in the coming year?
	Adjourn

SWOT Analysis Template

Organization:

Date:

Team members:

	HELPFUL	HARMFUL
INTERNAL	**STRENGTHS**	**WEAKNESSES**
EXTERNAL	**OPPORTUNITIES**	**THREATS**

Reflecting on the SWOT Analysis

- What stands out to you about your SWOT analysis?

- Where do your strengths and opportunities align? (These are your greatest advantages)

- Where do your weaknesses and threats align? (These are your greatest risks)

Reflecting on the SWOT Analysis (cont'd)

- What questions were raised through this analysis and how will you (and your team) find answers to them?

- What insights were revealed in this process that can inform the priority areas of focus for your organization's transformation?

- How might discoveries from the SWOT analysis inform your leadership team's strategic planning in the coming year?

Instructions for Living Leadership for System Transformation Activity

Objective: To recognize links across the elements of leadership for system transformation and identify an actionable way to interconnect them in practice.

Key Dispositions

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To complete this activity:

1. Read the reflection guide and identify which key disposition(s) you consider to be one of your greatest strengths (or review the results of your completed Diagnostic Reflection Tool and Mini 360 Feedback Tool to identify one if applicable).

2. Use the worksheet on the next page to record your responses to the questions below:

    a. Which key disposition(s) do you consider a strength of your own leadership?

    b. Which core practice(s) is/are most closely aligned to that disposition?

    c. Which system lever might you strengthen by leveraging your dispositional strength(s) and enacting the core practice(s) you selected?

    d. What might this integrated approach to leading system change look like in action in your own context?

3. Write out a statement of commitment that integrates these elements of leadership.

    I will leverage my strengths in [disposition] and enact [core practices] to impact/improve [system lever] in [my context]"

4. Reflect on what you learned through this activity using the prompts provided.

Worksheet for Living Leadership for System Transformation Activity

- Which key disposition(s) do you consider a strength of your own leadership?

- Which core practice(s) is/are most closely aligned to that disposition?

- Which system lever might you strengthen by leveraging your dispositional strength(s) and enacting the core practice(s) you selected?

- What might this integrated approach to leading system change look like in action in your own context?

- Complete this statement of commitment:

I will leverage my strengths in_____[disposition(s)]
and enact _____[core practices]
to impact/improve _____[system lever] in
_____[my context].

Reflecting on the Living Leadership for System Transformation Activity

- Think back on the SWOT Analysis and the priority areas that were identified in that activity. How do those areas connect to the system lever you selected above?

- Based on what you learned through this activity, how will you take action on your commitment?

- How did this activity challenge you or shift your thinking about leading system transformation toward continuous improvement?