The Process of Change
Why Change, What to Do, and How to Do It

Willard R. Daggett, Ed.D.
Founder and Chairman, International Center for Leadership in Education

Richard D. Jones, Ph.D.
Senior Consultant, International Center for Leadership in Education

International Center for Leadership in Education
Rigor, Relevance, and Relationships for ALL Students
The process of improving student performance goes by many different names. It has been referred to as school improvement, school reform, school reinvention, and school restructuring. No matter what it’s called, it comes down to the single goal of raising student achievement through change.

In working with schools across the county that are making concerted efforts at schoolwide change, the International Center has found the following characteristics to be true:

- Change must be revolutionary in spirit and evolutionary in time frame.
- Each school community is unique and has its own “DNA”; what works in one does not necessarily translate to another.
- Schools are unique systems that tend to maintain the status quo and often produce unintended consequences in response to change.
- Schools as systems produce the results they are designed to produce. If different results are desired, the focus must be on changing the system, not simply demanding the system work better.
- Schoolwide change can occur when guided by leadership, driven by data and supported through continuous professional learning.

A Model for Leadership and Change

The continuation of public education as we know it today is not guaranteed. The actions of school leaders will determine the fate of schools in the 21st century. One thing we know for sure is that status quo is not an option. Everyone is seeking change in schools. While all educators must play key roles in changing our schools, the burden is even greater for those in leadership positions. Leaders must respond to change appropriately and show others the way. They must take school staff on challenging journeys that the staff often would not take on their own.

Change in schools is dynamic. There is no recipe with a list of ingredients and simple steps, no detailed blueprint for schools to follow for success. However, there are lessons that can be learned from other schools. The International Center has worked with schools across the country to identify models, share best practices, conduct research, and support school leaders in facilitating changes that lead to improvement. This work has revealed that schools usually need to address four interconnected questions in order to achieve high academic standards for all students—why, what, where, and how. While these questions are interconnected, there is a sequence to addressing these questions. All schools must start with the why question. Next, the what question builds a common focus on what to change. Third, schools must set a direction with the where question. Finally, the how question deals with the implementation of change.
To further elaborate:

- **Why** involves convincing educators, parents, and community members as to why a school needs to change.
- **What** is the content of change, built through a common focus. It involves using good data, research, and best practices to determine what needs to change once people understand why.
- **Where** defines the location and direction, which involves assessing the present status, agreement on a common direction, and defining ways to measure improvement in student achievement.
- **How** is the process of change and involves determining how to change the school once people understand and embrace the why, what, and where.

Regrettably, many schools begin their improvement efforts in the reverse order—by first deciding how to do things differently. That is, they find a “solution” without clearly articulating the need or problem. Yet, if staff and stakeholders do not believe their school must change or understand what needs to change, the suggestion for how to change is likely to be ineffective or rejected. The solution is worthless for a problem that has not been acknowledged.

The graphic at right represents the International Center’s model of change, which is not simply about process. Change is driven by understanding the **why** of the need for change. Putting **why** in the center of the diagram illustrates its importance and the fact that it drives the change. **What**, **where**, and **how** become the three facets of change in schools. **What** defines the content and focus of the change. **Where** implies destination and where the school is headed and focuses on ways the school will evaluate its success in making changes. **How** describes the process of implementing the change. All three of these facets must be addressed for schools to accomplish successful change.

Change is not about simply adopting best practices, but rather about creating a culture that recognizes strengths and weaknesses, encourages innovation and initiative, and adapts best practices and ideas from others.

The nature of change is that it must be unique to local needs, forged through consensus, and built upon the unique strengths of each school. There is no one single solution to improving our schools. A combination of strategies is necessary to achieve a new vision of learning. The goal is not to make every school the same, but to enable each school to construct its own solutions.

**Why Change Schools**

The skills individuals need for success in the 21st century are vastly different from those needed in the past. Our education system must evolve in order to prepare students for the changing world in which they will live and work. American society is undergoing fundamental structural changes at the family, workplace, and community levels.
School reform begins with a desire by some—and at least a willingness of others—to be led. The administrators and staff in the most successful schools embrace change as exciting and challenging rather than intimidating and threatening. These educators seem to understand that schools today need to be updated in order to keep pace with a changing society and economy.

This nation’s fixation on preparing young people for college, while a worthy goal, can become an impediment to achieving world-class education standards. Parents and others must recognize that while we must continue to prepare our young people to be good citizens and ready them for higher education, we must also add a third important purpose to education—learning to apply academic skills needed for the increasingly sophisticated workplace. Then parents and community leaders must be convinced that schools need to change. Only then will a school be able to create the type of pressure necessary to support moving the curriculum to a more relevant base.

School districts that have been successful in creating a culture or environment to support change have used a variety of techniques: print, radio, and television media; special events and presentations; community partnerships; and parent and student focus forums. While Americans as a group seem convinced that this country’s schools must change, most parents and taxpayers think that their schools are just fine. High-performing schools clearly understand the realities of a changing society and, rather than feel threatened by these changes, seem to embrace the need for schools to evolve.

The International Center has assisted many school leaders in creating community and staff awareness of the need for change through research, presentations, print materials, white papers, newsletters, and video. These efforts address four major trends that must be acknowledged to ensure that our nation and our students are prepared to meet the challenges of the near and distant future:

- technology
- globalization
- demographics
- new generations in our classrooms

**What to Change — Aspire for Rigor, Relevance, and Relationships for All Students**

Finding successful practices in K-12 education that adequately prepare students for a changing world has been the purpose of the International Center since its inception in 1991. At that time, the International Center created a mission that addressed what needed to be done to prepare students for this changing world: *rigor and relevance for ALL students.*

While school districts across the country are increasingly using the words “rigor” and “relevance,” those terms are seldom defined. At the International Center, rigor and relevance are more than catchy words; they are part of a framework for defining what to change in schools and how to organize curriculum and instruction to prepare all students for the future.

“Relationships” was added as the third “R” based on the work with exemplary schools. Strong relationships are critical to completing rigorous work. Students are more likely to make a personal commitment to engage in rigorous learning when they know that teachers, parents, and other students actually care about how well they do. Relationships are the foundation on which rigor and relevance are built.
**Defining Rigor**
Academic rigor refers to learning in which students demonstrate a thorough, in-depth mastery of challenging tasks to develop cognitive skills through reflective thought, analysis, problem solving, evaluation, or creativity. It is the quality of thinking, not the quantity, that defines academic rigor, and rigorous learning can occur at any school grade and in any subject.

**Defining Relevance**
Relevance refers to learning in which students apply core knowledge, concepts, or skills to solve real-world problems. Relevant learning is interdisciplinary and contextual. Student work can range from routine to complex in any grade and any subject. Relevant learning is created, for example, through authentic problems or tasks, simulations, service learning, connecting concepts to current issues, and teaching others.

There are students who do extremely well academically but who seem to be dysfunctional in the world beyond school. They lack the ability to apply their knowledge to real-life situations. Rigor without relevance can enable students to be successful in school, but result in failure once they no longer have that structure and guidance.

To help educators better understand these concepts and their importance to creating high-quality educational experiences that enable student success in and beyond the classroom, the International Center created the Rigor/Relevance Framework® in the mid-1990s. The Rigor/Relevance Framework is based on two dimensions of higher standards and student achievement: knowledge and application.

**Rigor/Relevance Framework**
There is a continuum of knowledge that describes the increasingly complex ways in which we think. In defining rigor in this framework, we use the Knowledge Taxonomy, which is based on the six levels of Bloom’s Taxonomy:

1. Knowledge/Awareness
2. Comprehension
3. Application
4. Analysis
5. Synthesis
6. Evaluation

![Thinking Continuum](image)

The second continuum, created by the International Center, is known as the Application Model. This recognizes that learning increases in complexity with higher levels of application. This scale can be used to describe increasing relevance. The five levels of this action continuum are:
The Application Model describes how knowledge is put to use based on the levels of relevance. The high end signifies action—using the knowledge to solve complex real-world problems and to create projects, designs, and other works for use in real-world situations.

The Knowledge Taxonomy and Application Model are not separate scales but connected and relational. Often, as relevance is increased, so too is the knowledge level. The Rigor/Relevance Framework, illustrated below, uses four quadrants that represent levels of learning. On the Knowledge axis, the framework defines low rigor as Quadrants A and B and high rigor as Quadrants C and D.
On the Knowledge axis, Quadrant A represents simple recall and basic understanding of knowledge for its own sake. Quadrant A is labeled “Acquisition” because students gather and store bits of knowledge and information.

Quadrant C, “Assimilation,” represents more complex thinking, but still knowledge for its own sake. In Quadrant C, students extend and refine their acquired knowledge to be able to use it automatically and routinely to analyze and solve problems and to create unique solutions.

Quadrants B and D represent actions or high degrees of application. In Quadrant B, “Application,” students use acquired knowledge to solve problems, design solutions, and complete work. In Quadrant D, “Adaptation,” students have the competence to think in complex ways as they apply knowledge and skills they have acquired to new and unpredictable situations. Students create solutions and take actions that further develop their skills and knowledge.

For students to become lifelong learners, problem solvers, and decision makers, Quadrant B and D skills are required. In effect, our students need to know what to do when they do not know what to do. The Rigor/Relevance Framework provides a structure to enable schools to move all students toward that level.

One way to think about the Rigor/Relevance Framework in day-to-day instruction is in terms of the roles that teachers and students take. When instruction and expected student learning is in Quadrant A, the focus is on “teacher work.” Teachers expend energy to create and assess learning activities—providing information, creating worksheets, and grading student work. The student is often a passive learner.
When the student expectation moves to Quadrant B, the emphasis is on the student doing real-world work. This student work often is more complicated than Quadrant A work and requires more time. Learning in Quadrant B is best described as “student works” because students are doing extensive real-world tasks.

Learning in Quadrant C is best described as “student thinks.” In this quadrant, students are expected to think in complex ways—to analyze, compare, create, and evaluate. The term that best describes Quadrant D activities is “student thinks and works.” Learning in Quadrant D is more demanding and requires the student to think and work. Roles shift from the teacher-centered instruction in Quadrant A to student-centered instruction in Quadrants B, C, and D. Teachers still work in Quadrants B, C, and D, but their role is more as a coach or facilitator.

**Defining Relationships**

Relationships describe the emotional connection, or lack of connection, between people. We are social/emotional creatures, and we recognize, respond to, seek out, and develop connections with other people. Relationships are a description of the nature and quality of those connections.

In the same way the Knowledge Taxonomy and the Application Model have helped define knowledge and application, a clear taxonomy for relationships can drive improvement in connections related to learning.

The Relationship Framework, created by the International Center, describes seven levels of relationships.

**Level 0 is Isolation.** This is the lack of any positive relationships. The individual feels alone and isolated from relationships that would enhance learning.

**Level 1 is Known.** A person must know someone before a relationship is formed. When teachers seek to develop relationships with students, the first step is getting to know them—their likes, dislikes, aspirations, learning styles, and families.

**Level 2 is Receptive.** Often a learning relationship is described in terms of providing the assistance and support that a student needs. However, a preliminary step is for a teacher, for example, to show genuine interest in developing a relationship. This comes from frequent contact in multiple settings and active involvement.

**Level 3 is Reactive.** In this case, one person receives guidance or support from another. This relationship yields emotional support or cognitive information.

**Level 4 is Proactive.** At this level, the partners have made a proactive commitment to do more than assist when needed and take an active interest in supporting the other person.

**Level 5 is Sustained.** Positive support is received from family members, peers, and teachers. These are relationships that will endure over a long period of time. This is the level of relationship that effective parents have with their children.
**Level 6 is Mutually Beneficial.** This level occurs rarely in education, for at this point, both parties contribute support to one another for an extended period of time.

The various levels in the Relationship Framework help to identify the changes that need to be made to improve relationships. Relationships are not a dichotomy of good or bad. There are degrees of relationships, and teachers can work on behaviors that will improve learning relationships.

**Where Do We Start, Where Are We Now, Where Are We Heading?**

*Begin with the End in Mind*

Knowing that students need a rigorous and relevant curriculum taught in a climate of positive relationships is an important step in school reform. Once people have agreed to the need for rigor, relevance, and relationships, the difficult work then begins. Educators have this notion of rigor, relevance, and relationships, but they need more specific direction. They wonder: Where do we start? Where are we now? Where do we want to go? All these questions need to be defined in concrete quantifiable terms.

In this change model, the answer to the question, “Where?” is to know where you want end up as a result. Without a destination in mind, one road is as good as another. Any change can be considered. Schools need to know where they are going before they try to get there. While this may seem like common sense, most schools do not begin with a clear picture of what their desired student results are. Instead, schools jump into changes and solutions because that seems like the thing to do—be proactive, make a change, adopt a practice that is working somewhere else. While schools do need to change, changing too quickly or attempting to make changes without a clear destination will not be effective.

Even in the best of schools, leaders often have a sense that they need to change. This conclusion may have resulted in knowing that the school failed to serve some students adequately or because of less than satisfactory results for a subgroup on the state assessment. Change to most schools leaders seems to be about making things incrementally better. Most leaders believe there are many good things going on instructionally in their school. They see the prudent course as just changing a few things to address the visible problem of a few students not succeeding. Even in schools with significant student achievement issues, there is much good instruction. As a result, the prevailing approach of most school leaders is, “Let’s see if we can fix this problem.” or “What can we do to reach this group of students?” Changes tend to be incremental and at the same time detrimental. Schools start making changes and “fixing things” without a clear overall direction in mind.

*Single Myopic Measures*

Schools operated for a long time independent of formal and quantitative accountability systems. Over the past few decades, we have created stronger accountability measures but they focus only on a few aspects of schools—English language arts, mathematics, and science. This seems like the right thing to do. Who can argue with making sure that students acquire these basic skills? However, the impact on schools has been to make significant changes just to raise a test score. Practices such as eliminating recess and reducing instruction in the arts and technical courses have occurred to the detriment of students. Schools need to be cautious in making changes when the measures of success are very narrow.
The problem is that schools have left the designation of accountability measures to federal/state mandates. Schools need to be more proactive. Government may set one or two measures of schools success, but schools should design their own more comprehensive set of measures to determine their effectiveness.

This is the where in change—to examine where a school is heading. Attempting the change schools with only a few narrow measures of success, such as test scores, will not result in great schools and ultimately will force schools to discontinue practices that are an important and valuable part of learning. Schools must begin change with the end in mind—where is the school heading and will success be measured. The clarity and comprehensive nature of school accountability measures will drive changes around locally developed goals that enable continuous measurement of success.

The Learning Criteria, developed by the International Center, is an opportunity for schools to translate their beliefs about teaching and learning into measurable goals. Educators today feel conflicted about accountability measures that are limited in scope yet powerful in consequences. As a result schools feel like they are driving a car down the highway only looking out the right side window. They are forced to pay attention to one aspect when they truly believe that they should be looking in all directions. Educators are tense in this dilemma of limited measure of accountability as if they were waiting for a collision to happen. Stepping back and redefining learning measures in a more comprehensive manner, including but not limited to state tests, will enable educators to embrace goal-setting and accountability measures that are more consistent with what they believe about teaching and learning.

Following are several questions that will help focus on the need for revised accountability measures:

- How to you identify school success?
- How do you describe an “educated student” in your school?
- Does your school community have a way to measure success? Is it the same way others measure your success?
- Are state tests the only thing that matters? If not, what else does?
- Do you want to put state tests in their proper perspective?
- Does being judged only on state tests narrow your focus of work?
- How do you really measure whether school improvements are working?
- How do you focus your school community on the needs of students?
- Do current measures of student learning fail to identify some of your “best students?”

The Learning Criteria is one tool that supports school improvement processes through a stepwise data collection and analysis process. This is an essential and unique aspect of the International Center’s Model for Change, clarifying where schools want to be heading and set up specific measure to set goals and monitor progress. In the hands of a thoughtful and broad-based school leadership team, the Learning Criteria helps schools clarify their missions, prioritize problems and interventions, and critically review school performance. Further, these analyses provide critical rationales for establishing goals and developing action plans. Most importantly, the data generated by the Learning Criteria reflects the needs of learners in ways that less complex and more traditional measures overlook. The Learning Criteria is designed to provide a robust, comprehensive, and detailed portrait of school performance that clearly maps out a route for school improvement efforts.
An Overview of the Learning Criteria

The Learning Criteria is arranged in four data categories that school leaders can use to determine the success of their high schools in preparing students for current assessments and future roles and responsibilities. A school should have data indicators in all of the categories, and at least one indicator in each category should apply to the entire student population.

**Foundation Academic Learning**—Achievement in the core subjects of English language arts, math and science and others identified by the school.

**Stretch Learning**—Demonstration of rigorous and relevant learning beyond minimum requirements (participation and achievement in higher level courses, specialized courses, etc.).

**Learner Engagement**—The extent to which all learners are motivated and committed to learning; have a sense of belonging and accomplishment; and have relationships with adults, peers, and parents who support learning.

**Personal Skill Development**—Measures of personal, social, service, and leadership skills and demonstrations of positive behaviors and attitudes.

The International Center believes that core academic learning and state testing are essential, but not adequate. It defines the floor for learning and predominantly falls in Quadrant A on the Rigor/Relevance Framework.

Stretch learning is the most difficult of the criteria to measure because it compels schools to define how they are stimulating and stretching each student, not just the brightest. It challenges a school to find data to validate the claim that “all students will ...” If the school is truly stretching them, students will spend most of their time working in Quadrants C and D of the Rigor/Relevance Framework.

Personal skill development gets to the heart of what makes a citizen, friend, or community member. What is the school doing to promote these qualities? Is it making leadership opportunities available to all students? Is it creating a curriculum that teaches these skills and making them graduation requirements?

One of the features of education is that students are continuous learners. Student engagement identified the degree to which students exhibit the behaviors that show a continued interest in learning. Students need to be engaged before they can apply higher-order and creative-thinking skills. They learn most effectively when the teacher makes sense and meaning of the curriculum material being taught. This can only happen if the teacher has created a safe learning environment that encourages students to meet challenges and apply high-rigor skills to real-world unpredictable situations inside and outside of school.

Where to begin change is not with best practices, but with the school clearly focused on the end results of schooling. By having comprehensive indicators of student learning, a school is better prepared to select, adapt, and implement best practices that will make a difference in student learning.
How to Change

The Daggett System for Effective Instruction

The following elements, which fall under three overarching segments—Organizational Leadership, Instructional Leadership, and Teaching—encompass the Daggett System for Effective Instruction (DSEI). The DSEI provides a coherent focus across the entire education organization on the development and support of instructional effectiveness to improve student achievement. When organizational leaders, instructional leaders and teachers each carry out their respective elements and work together, positive change can occur.

Organizational Leadership

- **Create a culture of high academic expectations and positive relationships.** Organizational leaders hold the responsibility of communicating the culture of high expectations and the changes needed in order to improve academic success and cultivate positive relationships among all constituents. They must address the WHY, WHOM, and HOW and focus the message on the fact that all constituents must agree to and participate in the journey.
- **Establish a shared vision and communicate to all constituent groups.** Organizational leaders communicate the vision, goals, and action items to all constituents. This plan must focus on and reflect instructional effectiveness and positive relationships that lead to a culture of high expectations.
- **Align organizational structures and systems to the vision.** Organizational leaders demonstrate and communicate that there is a cohesive structure/system in place that supports the established vision, goals, and action items. Organizational leaders must effectively and efficiently bridge the system, from central office administration down through teacher ranks, connecting the development, alignment, adoption, and integration of the curriculum into instruction. They must also align the vision and structures to ensure literacy and math integration across all grade levels and disciplines.
- **Build leadership capacity through an empowerment model.** Organizational leaders empower others to lead and assist in transforming a school or district. Empowering others to lead around action items not only builds the capacity to complete goals, but also builds the capacity of others to lead and adapt to every changing need. Creating an empowered environment demands clear communication and collaboration at all levels, creating trust among the members of the organization.
- **Align teacher/leader selection, support, and evaluation.** Organizational leaders must focus on building the capacity of teachers and leaders through the selection, support, and supervision process, which is essential to the growth of individuals in an organization. A formative approach provides the best opportunity for teachers and leaders to successfully reach their personal and professional goals that, in turn, help the organization reach its goals. Focusing on the formative process provides opportunity for feedback and constructive professional learning that leads to successfully meeting the evaluation criteria.
- **Support decision making with relevant data systems.** Organizational leaders must ensure that easy-to-use, relative data systems are built, and that training is provided for all levels. Meaningful data systems are the key to monitoring student improvement and progress toward goals, and informing instruction. It is the responsibility of organizational leaders to monitor and ensure the system is used effectively at all levels, and that the data provides opportunities for deep conversations about student achievement, teacher growth, and goal attainment.
Instructional Leadership

- **Use research and establish the urgent need for change to promote higher academic expectations and positive relationships.** Instructional leaders must use research to reinforce the vision set forth by the organization. They must clearly communicate to all constituents the process that will be used for change needed in academic, social, and emotional areas.

- **Develop, implement, and monitor standards-aligned curriculum and assessments.** Instructional leaders are charged with implementing a curriculum and instruction process that engages teachers and key leaders and assures a tight connection between aligned standards and instruction and assessment. They are also responsible for monitoring the process to ensure that standards are aligned and that instruction and assessment reflect the adopted curriculum.

- **Integrate literacy and math across all disciplines.** Instructional leadership must ensure that that the integration and application of math and literacy standards across all disciplines is supported, implemented, and monitored.

- **Facilitate data-driven decision making to inform instruction.** Instructional leaders must ensure that relevant data is provided to educators. Educators, in turn, will access the information and use it to analyze trends toward district and school goals, monitor learner progress (growth toward proficiency), and differentiate instruction based on student needs. Instructional leaders must have systems in place and monitor the effective use of data.

- **Provide opportunities for professional learning, collaboration, and growth focused on high-quality instruction and increased student learning.** Instructional Leaders must use the most relevant data and research to determine the professional learning needs of the district or the school. They must find ways to implement professional learning that maximizes growth of individuals and then track increased learner achievement. Professional learning should target and support both the foundations of effective instruction and the foundations of effective leadership that support that effective instruction.

Teaching

- **Build effective instruction based on rigorous and relevant expectations.** Teachers must embrace and implement the organizational vision of high academic expectations. Teachers must be able to translate content knowledge into effective instructional strategies that are relevant to the learner.

- **Create and implement an effective learner environment that is engaging and aligned to learner needs.** Teachers must create a learning environment that addresses students’ personal, social, and emotional needs. The environment must engage ALL learners; therefore, the environment plays a key role in student success. Teachers must also develop positive relationships with students that allow them to “know” each student on an individual level. The presence of strong relationships between students and teachers builds a trust that positively impacts learning and the learning environment.

- **Possess and continue to develop content area knowledge and make it relevant to the learner.** Teachers must have a depth of content knowledge. Teachers, with the support of the system, must stay current with the most effective pedagogy, the most contemporary content, and the most relevant experiences that connect back to the content.

- **Plan and provide learning experiences using effective research-based strategies that are embedded with best practices including the use of technology.** Teachers must plan and provide learning experiences at high levels of rigor and relevance. Lessons must be tightly aligned to appropriate standards. Effective strategies and the use of technology must be embedded in all learning experiences that give all students access to the material.
Use assessment and data to guide and differentiate instruction. Teachers must use effective assessments, both formative and summative, to collect relevant data to make decisions on teaching and learning. Teachers must be able to differentiate and adapt instruction based on the needs of the class and individual students. They must be able to use the data to track student growth toward proficiency of the standards that were assessed.

Further content and instructional knowledge through continuous professional learning that is both enriching and collaborative. Teachers must be supported in continuous growth toward accessing and using the best instructional strategies and integrating technology into lessons. Through a systemic approach, they must also have access to a highly collaborative environment that empowers them to be leaders in the development of and sharing of effective practices. Only through a system that supports teacher development, collaboration, and professional practices will teachers be able to deliver learning environments that result in improved student achievement.

The DSEI builds upon the ideas, inspirations, practices, and research of others, including the best research and meta-analysis on effective instruction and the years of collective experience that International Center staff, consultants, and thought-leaders have accumulated and harvested from thousands of American schools. Teaching is more effective when effectively supported by leadership. Effective teaching is not the end goal, however; it is the means to an end: student achievement.