

## Activity: Driver Diagram (50–60 minutes)

### Overview

Having spent time analyzing your team’s problem focus area and having drafted a problem statement and aim statement, the next step is to turn that thinking into a visual improvement plan. This will be preserved as a driver diagram, or a visual representation of your team’s best theories for how your team can create the change you want to see. This diagram will become a platform for future work in several ways, but primarily through helping identify action steps, checking progress toward the goal, and capturing the team’s learning (reflected in their evolving theory) throughout the improvement process.

### Objective

Through a guided session of small- and large-group discussion, participants will create a visual improvement plan called a driver diagram, which will guide their work through testing changes to practice.

### Participants

- Improvement team
- Improvement team leader (as facilitator)

### Materials

- A completed *Problem Statement Readiness Check* tool (page 37) with a draft problem statement and a completed *Crafting an Aim Statement* tool (page 67) with a draft aim statement
- Any other critical documents produced during problem analysis (e.g., survey findings, empathy map results, observational checklists, etc.)
- (Optional) Graphic organizers (page 65)
- (Optional) *Solutions Parking Lot* (in Chapter 1)
- (Optional) Chart paper or a white board and markers, and stickers for voting

### Guiding Questions

- What is the aim of our improvement project and how do we plan to accomplish it?
- Where are the potential strategies for creating high-impact change?
- How can we turn our ideas into a coherent improvement plan?

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## Facilitation Notes

### 1. Introduction and Framing (5 minutes)

- Welcome your team and review the objective and guiding questions of the activity.
- Explain to your team that this activity will build on their previous work developing an understanding of the systemic nature of the problem they aim to solve. First, they will use some of the documents they have produced while investigating the problem to bring that thinking to the front of their minds. Then they will turn that knowledge of the problem and its components into a visual diagram of potential action steps for their ongoing improvement efforts.

### 2. Primer on Avoiding “Solutionitis” (5 minutes)

- Read your team the following quote, reminding them that they can find it at the top of their graphic organizer:
  - *“Solutionitis is the propensity to jump quickly on a solution before fully understanding the exact problem to be solved. It is a form of groupthink in which a set of shared beliefs result in an incomplete analysis of the problem to be addressed and fuller consideration of potential problem solving alternatives. When decision makers see complex matters through a narrow lens, solutionitis lures them into unproductive strategies.”* – Bryk et al., *Learning to Improve*, page 24
  - Ask your team what about the quote resonates with them. Invite them to share a story if anyone has an example of a school improvement that might be described as the result of solutionitis.
- Tell your team that today they are going to try to avoid succumbing to solutionitis by exploring multiple options before committing to one approach. For this reason, the activity breaks up the planning into multiple steps and leaves solutions to the end. Solutionitis is a common problem because solution ideas naturally flow from discussions about the challenges educators face. Remind them that when the conversation drifts toward solutions, their job is to call it out and record the idea on the *Solutions Parking Lot* so that they can return to it later in the activity.

### 3. Refining Your Aim Statement (10 minutes)

- Explain that the first step toward collectively solving their common problem is setting a goal to work toward. Review the work that the team has done to analyze the problem by looking at the *Problem Statement Readiness Check* tool and draft aim statement.
- Spend a few minutes reviewing the draft aim statement for feedback and understanding.
  - Show your team the criteria of a good aim statement.

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- Read them the aim statement and ask them to discuss the aim statement as it relates to the listed criteria:
  - It should be S.M.A.R.T.<sup>1</sup>
  - It should address a high-priority need of students and the school community overall.
  - It should reflect the insights from the analysis of the problem, or be closely connected to them so that you can benefit from what you have learned.

#### 4. Creating Drivers (20 minutes)

- Write the aim statement on the left side of your chart paper or white board.
- Explain that the next step in the process is to describe the primary drivers. Primary drivers represent the areas of influence that are necessary for accomplishing the aim.
  - For example, if a school selects an aim of “increasing homework completion to 90%,” possible drivers might be “students understand the task” or “students see the value of the homework.” These drivers work because they describe an area that has a clear connection to the aim, and a school can reasonably believe that by making progress in these areas they can *drive* an increase in homework completion.
  - A driver should answer the question: “What must happen in order for us to accomplish our aim?”
- Tell your team that the work they have already done to analyze the problem was critical to this process and they should lean on their earlier thinking. Distribute the *Problem Statement Readiness Check* tool and any other problem-analysis artifacts.
  - Divide your team into two or three groups and have them spend two minutes reviewing the documents and three minutes sharing insights that they think are important for accomplishing the aim.
  - Tell your team to work within their groups to write potential drivers on sticky notes for about three minutes (one driver per sticky note).

Have your team share their ideas with the larger group. Encourage them to look for similarities and cluster “like” ideas. If stuck, encourage the group to think about the problem from the perspective of students or other users. Move on when the group runs out of ideas, hits 10 ideas (after clustering), or exceeds the 20-minute time limit for this step in the protocol.

<sup>1</sup> S.M.A.R.T. goals are *Specific, Measurable, Aspirational but attainable, Relevant, and Time-bound.*

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- Explain that part of the purpose of creating drivers is to help schools to prioritize their efforts to create the biggest impact while still respecting the time educators have to dedicate to their many other responsibilities. Ask your team to rank the top six drivers (or driver clusters) in order of potential impact on the aim.
  - Tell your team they have five “votes” for the driver(s) that they think will have the greatest impact on the aim. They can distribute those votes among the drivers, or they can vote multiple times for the same driver if they want, as long as they don’t exceed five total votes.
  - Go around the room voting, using stickers or tally marks.
  - Place the final six drivers on the communal driver diagram.

## 5. Creating Secondary Drivers (10–20 minutes)

- Tell your team that the next step involves thinking about how they can enact each of their drivers. In doing so they will be identifying areas that are within their control to influence and which will lead to the changes described by each driver. It can be helpful to think of these steps as opportunities where they can take action.
  - Divide into two or three groups and assign each group **one primary driver** to tackle. Have them brainstorm ideas on sticky notes like before, but this time using the following guiding questions:
    1. How can we make this happen?
    2. Where is an opportunity to make an impact on this driver?
  - After three to five minutes, bring the groups back together and ask them to share. Place the secondary drivers on the communal driver diagram and ask listening teams if they have any secondary drivers they want to suggest to the presenting group.
  - If time allows, divide the remaining primary drivers among the groups and repeat these steps until the diagram is complete.

## 6. Reflection and Next Steps (5 minutes)

- Use a marker to draw lines on the communal driver diagram connecting the aim statement to the primary drivers, and those drivers to their associated secondary drivers. Label the space to the right of the secondary drivers as change ideas, and explain that these will be the focus of the next step in the process. But before the team gets there, you want them to understand what they have just finished creating.
  - Ask your team to look at the diagram as a whole for a moment. Tell them that it represents a snapshot of their collective thinking at this moment in time. Remind them that it does not have to represent a perfect plan for solving their problem, just a promising one.

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- Tell your team that one way to make sense of the driver diagram is to use the following sentence, read from left to right (if you plan to engage in the optional Step 7 below, you can distribute the graphic organizers now):

“If we want to accomplish     [aim]    , we must     [primary driver]      
through/by/with     [secondary driver]     and one way to do that is  
    [change idea]    .”

**NOTE:** *Deciding on which change idea to begin testing will happen in the next session. If your team needs clarification on what change ideas are, you can tell them that they are small action steps that they will be using to implement changes in a deliberate and measured way.*

- (Optional) A second way to check the connections between components is by using “how” and “why” prompts. Reading from left to right, each connection should answer the question “How?”; reading from right to left, each connection should answer the question “Why?”

## 7. (Optional) Preview of Future Use of the Driver Diagram (5 minutes)

- If time allows, you may want to preview the purpose of the diagram your team has just created. Ask your team to look at the diagram and take two minutes to answer the following four questions for themselves:
  1. What secondary driver do you think would be the most fruitful for you to work on?
  2. What piece of the diagram are you most motivated to work on?
  3. What piece of the diagram would you want formative data on to show you if you are making progress?
  4. What piece of the diagram do you worry might not work as planned?
- Ask them to quickly share their answers with a partner.
- Tell them that each of the four questions they were discussing corresponds to one of the four uses of the driver diagram. Tell them to look to the bottom of their graphic organizer and compare their answers with the four listed purposes:
  1. Prioritize among the many possible strategies for accomplishing their aim.
  2. Organize the efforts of different members of the team (and/or partners at different schools) to work toward accomplishing a common aim.

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3. Provide a tool for selecting the best way to measure progress toward that aim.
  4. Capture the learning that happens over the course of the work in the form of revisions to the diagram.
- Tell your team that the first step toward accomplishing all four goals is to create a shared understanding of your strategy, and the document they have just helped create does exactly that. The next step of the process will be to use the driver diagram to accomplish purpose number one, in which they will prioritize and decide what small part of this strategy to tackle first. Thank your team for their work.

## Participant Graphic Organizer

Prompt for reading a driver diagram:

“If we want to accomplish \_\_\_\_\_ **[aim]**, we must \_\_\_\_\_ **[primary driver]**,  
through/by/with \_\_\_\_\_ **[secondary driver]**, and one way to do that is **[change idea]**.”

Reflection questions:

1. What secondary driver do you think would be the most fruitful for you to work on? (Consider your interest and how closely it connects to your work.)

2. What piece of the diagram are you most motivated to work on?

3. What piece of the diagram would you want formative data on to show you if you are making progress?

4. What piece of the diagram do you worry might not work as planned?

Purposes of a driver diagram:

1. Prioritize among the many possible strategies for accomplishing the team’s aim.
2. Organize the efforts of different members of the team (and/or partners at different schools) to work toward accomplishing a common aim.
3. Provide a tool for selecting the best way to measure progress toward that aim.
4. Capture the learning that happens over the course of the work in the form of revisions to the diagram.