

## Scaling Up: Making Big Changes Bigger

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Earlier this year, I had the opportunity to attend a seminar hosted by the [Billions Institute](#) on the topic of scaling up change initiatives, and it got me thinking about the early literacy work we are doing in Tennessee. We have a lot of simultaneous changes happening in order to promote increased student proficiency in the area of literacy. Changing literacy outcomes for students involves making many small changes to everyday practice, as well as several large changes in the structure and design of the literacy block. In addition, in the coaching network, we have changed the way we provide professional development and how we view and use literacy coaches in schools.

As I've been talking to district leaders and coaches about their work this year, everyone is excited about the changes they see and the impact those changes are having on students. Many have talked about scaling up this work: increasing the implementation of the changes from the cohort group of Read to be Ready teachers to more teachers in our districts. So, how do we scale up with success? **Successful scaling requires identifying the key levers that are making our change efforts successful and replicating those key levers in larger, more expansive ways.** I'd like to take a moment to identify some of the possible key levers working in Tennessee schools and offer several suggestions to consider for districts looking to scale up.

### Key Lever 1: Support

Coaches often say that an essential component to their success is the ability to provide follow-up support to teachers following professional learning. In other words, **support is a key lever for making lasting change.** Support builds trust, collegiality, and buy-in for change efforts. Support also increases the transfer of learning to the classroom. It provides a safety net as teachers try new things and encourages all staff members to take a learning stance in the process.

Therefore, **before you start to scale your change efforts, consider how you will support teachers in the classroom throughout the change process.** The more we can support teachers—through modeling, co-teaching, and observing—as they implement, the more traction new practices gain.

In our urge to scale, it is important to pay attention to how scaling efforts will be received. In places where teachers feel supported as they take on new practices, they have a more positive outlook on the changes themselves; they feel excited and energized. However, when teachers don't feel supported, the opposite can occur. I spoke with one teacher whose district decided to roll out interactive read aloud training to every teacher. They did so through a one-time professional development session. While the intent of the training was positive (the district wanted everyone in the district to know about interactive read aloud), the teacher complained that it wasn't sufficient to help her implement the practice. It left her feeling like a huge

expectation for change was placed on her, without the necessary support to make it happen. This, in turn, left her feeling defeated and less confident in her abilities to support students.

Consider the saying, “Go slow to go fast.” **Think about how many teachers you can support well, and choose teachers that can support you in scaling up.** Create an intentional scale-up plan to ensure that you maintain a positive culture and that you build momentum throughout the change process.

### **Key Lever 2: Collaboration**

Change is hard, so it is important for teachers embarking on these changes to have many opportunities to work together. Read to be Ready teachers shared that **opportunities to collaborate** and work with other teachers in their grade levels, schools, and districts **were extremely valuable** in supporting their efforts. Opportunities to collaborate built a shared sense of ownership and pride that helped propel the work forward. In one school, these collaborative opportunities also led teachers to take ownership of sharing the practices they learned with other grade levels. The school developed cross-grade-level collaboration opportunities where teachers were supported by coaches that could support other teachers in the building.

As you consider scaling the work, be sure to **plan for increased opportunities for collaboration**. The type of collaboration that results in changes to practice doesn’t happen by accident. First, set aside dedicated time in the schedule for collaboration. Teachers need other teachers like them to collaborate, so finding partnering teachers in the same grade level and with similar students is ideal. Next, establish structures and norms that support collaboration. They may seem awkward at first, but they really do help groups work together in ways that make the best use of their time and effort.

### **Key Lever 3: Small Chunks of Learning**

The materials presented to coaches during fall and winter convenings are not intended to be presented to teachers all at once. Rather, they are meant to be utilized as a set of resources for long-range planning of learning opportunities around a singular focus. Schools that reported positive changes to practice and positive reception from teachers generally chunked their learning into **small, actionable change objectives**. Learning the overall instructional strategy in manageable bites over an extended period of time allows teachers multiple opportunities to practice and prevents the learning process from becoming overwhelming.

In designing the scale-up plan for your district, determine which small chunks of learning you might focus on and how long it might reasonably take you to support teachers in acquiring that learning. Consider the needs of students in your district and which practices might provide the most impact in changing outcomes for students. Then, determine what structures you might have available for delivering

that learning to teachers. Again, consider taking it slow. **Small, intentional efforts towards change are more likely to result in long-term impact.** If you move too quickly, it may create an awareness of practices, but miss the mark on cementing the practices as norms.

### **Conclusion**

It is an exciting time to be an educator in Tennessee as we unite around a common vision for high-quality literacy practices aimed at ensuring that 75 percent or more of third graders are reading on grade level by 2025. Change often requires new or renewed perspectives and sometimes presents opportunities to seek new solutions. Yet, the work we do is going to make a difference in the lives of the students we serve. Scaling up the work of the coaching network will be instrumental in helping us meet this ambitious goal. As you embark on your efforts to scale, consider these key levers, as well as others you might identify in the work within your district. Consider how these levers might influence your scale-up plans, and **scale with intentionality for sustained improvement.**