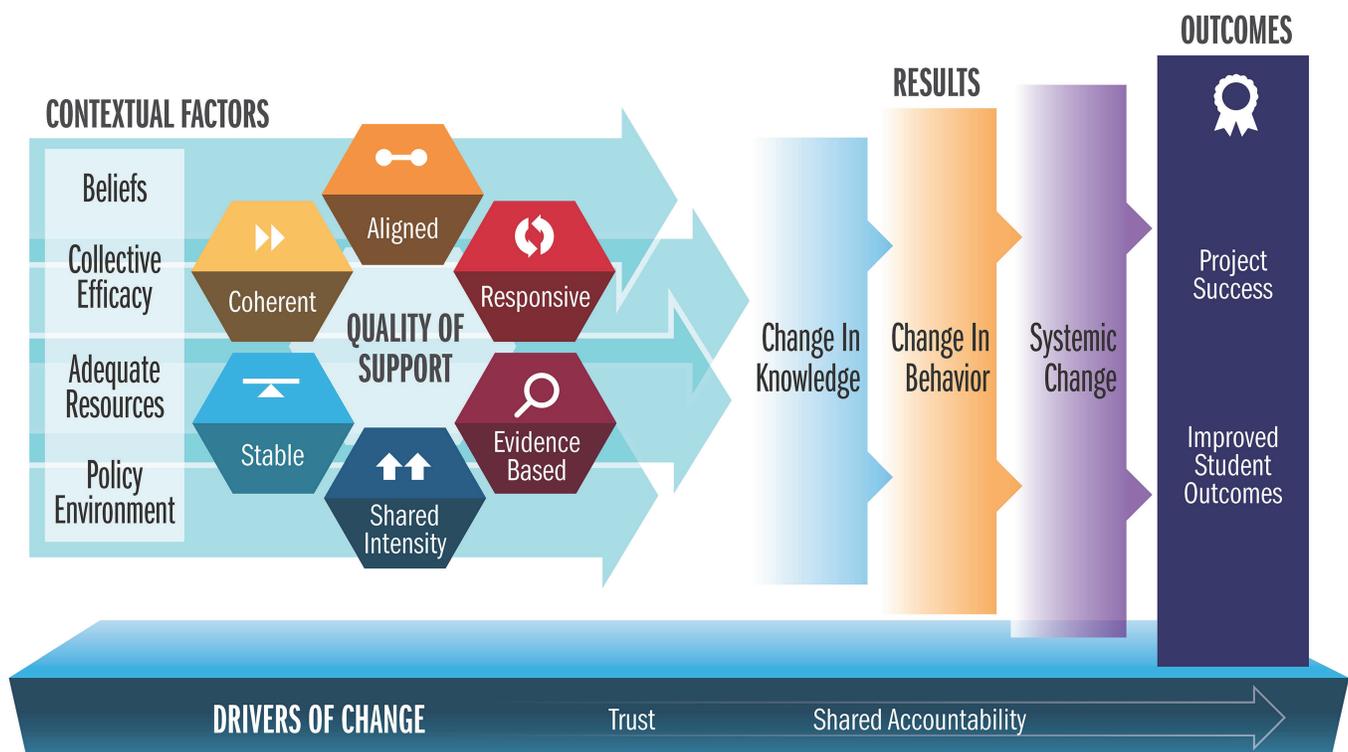


# Theory of Change for a Successful School Improvement Partnership

*A Publication From Regional Educational Laboratory Southwest*

Developed by the District and School Improvement Cross-REL Working Group, this infographic outlines a theory of change for building an effective school improvement partnership. Such partnerships can thrive given three sets of favorable conditions that support successful engagement: six key qualities in the support provided, a set of shared beliefs and sense of collective efficacy across partners, and the presence of adequate resources and a supportive policy environment. Trust and shared accountability between partners are foundational elements that contribute to success, and are built over time under these conditions.



## Quality of Support

Research in this area does not include causal or rigorous evidence about the most critical characteristics of high-quality support in a school improvement partnership. However, multiple sources<sup>1</sup> indicate that six specific characteristics of the support provided can affect the quality of a partnership; in addition, key contextual factors should be taken into consideration when planning for change.

**Aligned:** The partnership and support provided include established goals and relevant expertise to meet stakeholders' needs.

**Responsiveness/customization:** External partners respond promptly to inquiries, make themselves available at times convenient to the local partner, and provide suggestions that are sensitive to the local partner's needs, constraints, and context.

**Evidence-based:** Recommendations focus on strategies that are supported by moderate to strong evidence as defined under the Every Student Succeeds Act.<sup>2</sup>

**Shared intensity:** An external partner's approach is a good match for the local partner's needs and capacity to participate. Intensity is measured in terms of the number of days of assistance, the level of personnel resources, or the span of time over which support is provided.

**Stable:** External supports fit into the local partner's long-term strategy. Support is flexible enough to adapt to feedback from the field, yet features a stable core of personnel and strategies.

**Coherent:** External supports collectively reinforce and do not contradict one another. Various approaches do not lead to unnecessary duplication of effort, work at cross purposes, or confuse staff.

## Contextual Factors

**Beliefs:** Stakeholders should believe that change needs to occur and that it is possible.

**Collective efficacy:** For stakeholders to commit to the change process and to engage with external providers, they must believe that their efforts will yield results.

**Adequate resources:** The level of fiscal, human, and material resources is not so limited as to be a notable distraction for the change process.

**Policy environment:** The external policy environment (state and district) must avoid fostering a sense of reform churn, instability, and unreasonable policy demands.

## Drivers of Change

**Trust:** Trust and the shared belief that everyone is on the same side enables all stakeholders to work as partners, enabling the work to progress faster.<sup>3</sup>

**Shared accountability:** All stakeholders have clear roles and responsibilities and shared commitment.

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### References

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- <sup>2</sup> U.S. Department of Education, Office of Elementary and Secondary Education. (2016). *Non-regulatory guidance: Using evidence to strengthen education investments*. Washington, DC: Author. Retrieved from: <https://www2.ed.gov/policy/elsec/leg/essa/guidanceuseinvestment.pdf>; Hassel & Steiner, 2019; LeFloch & Barbour, 2014.
- <sup>3</sup> Covey, S. M. R., & Merrill, R. R. (2006). *The speed of trust: The one thing that changes everything*. New York, NY: Free Press; Hassel & Steiner, 2019; LeFloch & Barbour, 2014.



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