 

**Scenario - Graduation**

During an annual review of state-wide graduation data, SEA staff concluded that students who have been determined eligible for special education under the category “Emotional Disturbance” (ED) were dropping out of school at much higher rates than their peers. In addition, it appeared that within that group, students at greatest risk for dropout were Latino males living in large urban districts.

Some SEA leaders and staff were aware of a growing body of research indicating that a student’s status in the ninth-grade (or even earlier in some studies) was the single best predictor of whether he or she would graduate. These findings suggested to staff that parents and teachers should carefully monitor the academic and engagement status (including such things as attendance, achievement, suspension, expulsion and mobility) of students with ED before or during the first semester of their freshman year, when there are still opportunities to help them make successful transitions to high school, and thus be more likely to graduate.

The Special Education Division of the SEA was charged with the task of determining what steps should be taken to reduce dropout rates for these students. A team was quickly formed, which included members from all units within the Special Education Division. This team developed a plan to install an early warning system in the three largest urban districts in the state to allow the districts to track the academic and engagement status of all their 9th grade students. The team had yet to determine what the districts should do to support at-risk students, once identified. They intended to tackle that task collaboratively with the districts once their tracking systems were fully in place.

Several individuals within the team had been using an implementation science (IS) approach to organize and lead another SEA initiative, so they suggested that IS frameworks be used to implement the early warning systems as well. Most team members knew the basics of IS but were not fluent in all of the frameworks. They feared that they did not have time to learn how to teach the frameworks to the participating districts, nor were they convinced that the districts would want to learn about IS along with the technical information needed to put the early warning systems in place and use it for tracking purposes.

Given the important role that parents would play in this effort, several other individuals within the team, with expertise and experience in stakeholder engagement, recommended that they incorporate the LbC framework and tools to ensure that relevant stakeholders, especially local implementers and parents, were engaged in decisions from the onset. Although all agreed that stakeholder engagement would be essential to the success of the work, some on the team had reservations about opening the team up to any outside stakeholder involvement before leadership in the three districts were fully onboard with the plan, as each district had some negative history with parents and with the state’s teachers’ union. Districts may also have recommendations about which stakeholders to select.

The team decided to explore the benefits of using both sets of frameworks and to discuss how they might work together to support the initiative. After this exploration, the team determined that both frameworks were helpful, and decided to incorporate them into this dropout effort.

Exploration Questions:

1. What do you think the benefits are for using:
   1. LbC to support this work?
   2. IS to support this work?
   3. The two bodies of work together?
2. What do you think the strengths/barriers will be to using both together?
3. What next steps should the team take:
   1. Through the lens of IS?
   2. Through the lens of LbC?
   3. Through the combined lens of both?