



The K–12 Improvement Imperative:

Pathways to adopting continuous improvement

► The Imperative

Every principal and superintendent knows they'll be expected to make their schools better. In meeting this improvement imperative, they have no shortage of options.

► The Challenge

Initiatives aimed at improvement— such as new curriculum, new discipline policies, or professional development—routinely break down because they don't account for complex interdependencies across a school system. Among the many ways to improve, **continuous improvement (CI)** approaches hold promise.¹ But their track record doesn't guarantee leaders will choose them.

► Continuous Improvement's Track Record



The Fresno Unified School District increased the number of students applying to non-local colleges by over **50%**²



Summit Public Schools decreased the test score performance gap between English learners and non-English learners by **50%**³

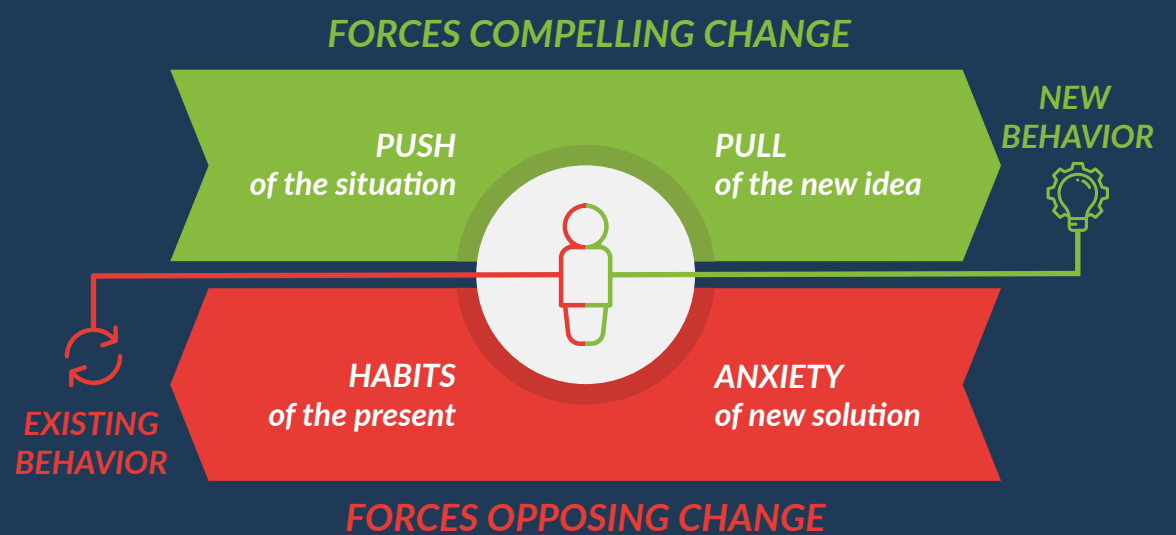


Networks of schools in both Connecticut and Chicago saw their graduation rates increase by roughly **10%**⁴

► The Theory of Jobs to Be Done

Jobs to Be Done is a lens for understanding the circumstances — or forces — that drive people and organizations toward and away from new behavior. It ultimately reveals customer demand.

In the context of the improvement imperative, these forces shape leaders' decisions about how to pursue improvement.



► The 3 Jobs That Drive the Quest to Improve

1. CORRECT:

I have a specific problem. Help me fix it.



Circumstances include:

- A sense of responsibility to students
- A pressing problem to be solved
- Current approaches not working

Ways to align CI:

- Easy-to-learn tools and practices tailored to their problem
- On-demand coaching on diagnosing and solving systemic issues

2. COORDINATE:

I'm frustrated. Help me rally others to move the needle.



Circumstances include:

- A sense of responsibility to students
- Data documenting a problem
- Interdependence with other departments/teams

Ways to align CI:

- A solution specific to their problem
- Strategies for coordinating people involved in the solution

3. REORIENT:

Old solutions aren't working. Help us find a new way.



Circumstances include:

- A sense of responsibility to students
- Multiple system-wide problems
- Knowing that top-down mandates won't work

Ways to align CI:

- A method for organizing staff to solve systemic problems
- Training resources that make continuous improvement persuasive and easy to learn

► A Job to Be Done Is Not



A ROLE

(e.g., superintendent, teacher, curriculum director)



A SET OF RESPONSIBILITIES

(e.g., hire staff, set a calendar)

PRECURSORS TO ADOPTING CONTINUOUS IMPROVEMENT:

- Persistent failure with past approaches
- Prior exposure to data-based problem solving
- Belief that front-line staff are best equipped to solve problems



Learn more in the full report: www.christenseninstitute.org/publications/improvement-imperative

References:

1. <https://cprl.law.columbia.edu/sites/default/files/content/CPRL-Gates%20Report-082318-FINAL.pdf>
2. <https://edpolicyinca.org/sites/default/files/FUSD-continuous-improvement.pdf>
3. <https://docs.google.com/presentation/d/1ECyYoX-jIXvIBdOWpIPUODVr8WVaennqastG423Wv8/edit>
4. <https://www.carnegiefoundation.org/engage-with-us/spotlight-on-quality-in-continuous-improvement/2020-spotlight-honorees/>