

The Value of the SCIP® Model for Strategic & School Improvement Planning

DR. DANA GODEK, MICHAEL MOORE, DR. RYOKO YAMAGUCHI, & DR. KELLY DOLAN-SAPP



INTRODUCTION

As we've worked with leaders from Assistant Principals to Superintendents, we've seen that each person has preferences, things that draw their attention and passion. While passion and expertise are good things, school improvement is a comprehensive activity: it requires 'covering your bases' to identify the full range of root causes, the highest leverage action steps, and the most complex change management challenges.

Over time and using the research-based practices described below, we've developed the SCIP - Systems, Culture, Instruction, and People - model to guide leaders' scan of their organizational strengths and needs and direct their planning.

The SCIP model has been particularly useful in setting observable and measurable expectations for principals - typically in a 'Scorecard ' - and then using those expectations to design optimized principal supervision and support models.

In short, the Systems, Culture, Instruction, People (SCIP) model provides a heuristic—an intuitive method for breaking down complex challenges— that can be used at any level of leadership and by individuals, teams, and evaluators to align resources, balance priorities, and take effective action.

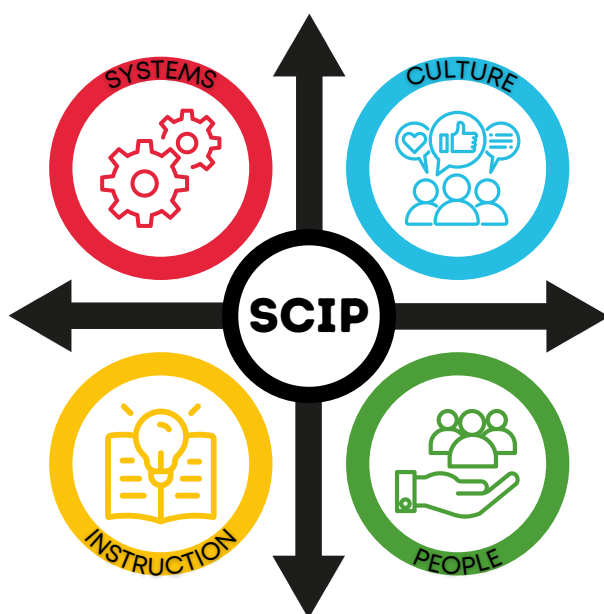
This white paper explores the value of SCIP and analyzes its connection to and differentiation from established educational leadership frameworks, including those by Marzano, Fullan, Bryk, Senge, Hattie, and TNTP. Through this analysis, we aim to demonstrate how SCIP serves as a practice, intuitive, yet comprehensive tool.

SCIP DEFINED

SCIP is not a step-by-step guide or a technical solution. It is a thinking tool that organizes strategic priorities into four essential and interrelated domains:

- **Systems:** The operational infrastructure—budgeting, staffing, governance, data, and logistics—that sustains daily operations and strategic goals.
- **Culture:** The shared values, beliefs, and norms that shape relationships, trust, and engagement among educators, students, and communities.
- **Instruction:** The methods, strategies, and professional practices that drive student learning.
- **People:** The human capital strategy that includes hiring, development, collaboration, and leadership pathways.

SCIP simplifies the complexity of district and school leadership into these four domains by ‘covering the bases’ rather than reducing the power of each domain. The model’s utility lies in its flexibility and comprehensiveness—it provides structure without rigidity – which can be used for both planning and implementation monitoring.



COMPARISON TO MAJOR FRAMEWORKS

To assess the value of SCIP, it is important to examine how it aligns with and diverges from other prominent frameworks in educational leadership. Unlike these frameworks, which often emphasize one or two domains (e.g., instruction in Hattie, culture in Fullan, people in TNTP), SCIP gives equal, integrated weight to all four domains. It acts as a crosswalk that allows leaders to situate all their work within the model with rigor and balance. The model also has the advantage of having face-value validity.

Framework	Systems	Culture	Instruction	People
Marzano – High-Reliability Schools	Level 1: Safe & Supportive Environment; data systems and operations	Levels 2-3: Collaborative leadership; strong school culture	Levels 4-5: Effective teaching; curriculum	Instructional leadership; staff development
Fullan – Coherence Framework	Policy and initiative alignment	Collaborative culture; moral purpose	Pedagogical transformation	Capacity building; teacher empowerment
Bryk – Five Essentials	Organizational supports; resource use	Relational trust; professional community	Rigorous curriculum; data-informed teaching	Staff collaboration; leadership capacity
Senge – Learning Organization	Systems thinking; organizational learning	Shared vision; team learning	Continuous instructional improvement	Leadership as learning; staff mastery
Hattie – Visible Learning	Schoolwide data use; strategic planning	Student-teacher relationships; expectations	High-impact teaching strategies	Collective efficacy; PD focus
Childress et al. – Managing for High Performance	Budgeting; HR; governance	Coherence; equity lens	Curriculum alignment; instructional support	Talent systems; hiring; PD
TNTP – Opportunity Myth	Policy alignment; equitable resourcing	High expectations culture	Aligned instruction; rigorous content	Talent development; recruitment; retention

THE HEURISTIC VALUE OF SCIP

Unifying strategic priorities. SCIP functions as a sorting mechanism. When leaders face initiative overload—multiple improvement plans, mandates, and reforms—SCIP allows them to map efforts against four stable domains, preventing fragmentation and promotes coherence.

Operationalizing strategy. Many frameworks are visionary but difficult to implement. SCIP bridges the gap between high-level strategy and operational decision-making. It gives leaders a way to translate goals into aligned activities across central office departments and school sites.

Centering often neglected domains. Instruction often dominates school improvement discourse. SCIP re-centers Systems and People—domains often overlooked yet critical to sustainability. For example, weak systems undermine even the best instructional reforms, and a district cannot succeed without stable, high-quality talent pipelines.

Rapid usability and flexibility. Unlike technical models requiring deep training, SCIP can be used quickly by leadership teams to assess initiatives, diagnose challenges, and guide planning. Its simplicity invites wide adoption without loss of nuance.

Shared language across roles. SCIP creates a common mental model for leaders at all levels. Whether in cabinet meetings, school leadership teams, or community planning sessions, the four SCIP domains offer a shared vocabulary for alignment.

SCIP COMPONENT DEEP DIVES

Systems. Often invisible, systems form the infrastructure of school improvement. Coherent governance, budgeting aligned to priorities, data systems for continuous improvement, and predictable operational processes are all part of this domain.

Research by Childress et al. and Bryk underscores the role of systems in driving equity and sustaining reforms. Without strong systems, even the best instructional practices or cultural shifts are unsustainable.

Culture. Culture encompasses relational trust, norms of collaboration, and shared beliefs about student success. Fullan and Bryk highlight culture as a prerequisite for improvement, and SEL research (e.g., Durlak et al.) shows its direct impact on engagement and outcomes. SCIP ensures culture is not treated as a byproduct but a strategic priority.

Instruction. High-quality instruction remains the central mechanism for learning. SCIP, like Hattie's research and City et al.'s work on instructional rounds, recognizes the need for aligned curriculum, data-informed teaching, and continuous teacher learning. It embeds instruction within a broader system that supports—not isolates—it.

People. No reform can succeed without attention to human capital and the workforce. This includes teacher recruitment and retention, leadership development, and creating career pathways. Darling-Hammond and TNTP's work confirm that people are the linchpin of school success. SCIP explicitly incorporates this domain to guide districts in investing wisely in talent.

SCIP COMPONENT DEEP DIVES, CONTINUED

SCIP provides a meta-framework that helps leaders make sense of and act on the multitude of research-based practices already at their disposal. By focusing on the four coherent domains—Systems, Culture, Instruction, and People—SCIP offers a heuristic that is grounded in research and honed by practice. It is, in short, what leaders need most: a practical way to think clearly, lead coherently, and act decisively.

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