Your Initiative Audit in 10 Minutes

80% of school initiatives fail (Reeves, 2019), and the principal is the number one factor in whether an instructional initiative succeeds (Grissom et al., 2021). Most ideas don't fail because they're bad. They fail because they're crowded out.

What causes initiative fatigue

1. **Too many at once.** Running several initiatives at the same time weakens even the best strategies.
2. **Outside pressure.** Politics, bureaucracy, and well-meaning leaders keep adding to the list.
3. **Underestimating the cost.** Every initiative takes teacher time and energy, usually more than planned.

Step 1: List it all (3 minutes)

Write down everything teachers are expected to do this year beyond teaching their content: programs, platforms, PD focuses, committees, data and paperwork, and district or state mandates. If teachers would call it "one more thing," list it.

Step 2: Score it (4 minutes)

Score each item from 1 to 3 in three areas:

- **Impact:** Is there evidence it's improving student learning here? (1 = no evidence, 3 = clear evidence)
- **Time:** How much teacher time does it take? (1 = a lot, 3 = very little)
- **Fit:** Does it serve your number one priority? (1 = not really, 3 = directly)

#	Initiative	Mandated? Y/N	Impact 1–3	Time 1–3	Fit 1–3	Total	Decision
1							
2							
3							
4							
5							
6							
7							
8							
9							
10							

Step 3: Decide (3 minutes)

Decision	When to use it
Keep	Total of 8–9. It's working and worth the time. Protect it.
Merge	It fits your priority but overlaps with something else. Combine them into one.
Pause	Total of 6–7 and not mandated. Put it on hold until the core priority is solid.
Stop	Total of 3–5 and not mandated. Let it go, and tell teachers you did.

Decision	When to use it
Shrink	Mandated but low-scoring. Meet the requirement with the smallest possible footprint.

Before you leave

Our number one priority this year: _____

One thing I'll stop or pause: _____

The time it frees up goes to: _____

Rule of thumb: one new initiative in, one old initiative out. When you stop something, say so out loud. Teachers notice what's been removed as much as what's been added.

Want help focusing your school's plate?

Engaging Learners helps school leaders choose one literacy priority and see it through: Science of Reading PD for grades K–12, literacy and instructional coaching, and leadership support for Tier 1–3 planning.

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