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PRIORITY SELECTION GUIDE

The 13 Priority Anchors

for Strengthening Tier 1 Instruction



One shared direction for your building.

A handbook for leaders, coaches, and teams choosing the one or two Anchors everyone works on together.

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SECTION 1

What Priority Anchors Are

The **13 Anchors for Strengthening Tier 1 Instruction** name the areas of practice that make the biggest difference in core, grade-level teaching. A school chooses one or two of the 13 as its **Priority Anchors**, the shared instructional priorities everyone works on together.

3 **INSTRUCTIONAL READINESS**

The conditions that let students begin, participate, and stay engaged in learning.

10 **INSTRUCTIONAL IMPACT**

The teaching practices that move grade-level learning forward.

Each Anchor holds a small set of **Simple Strategies**: practical moves a teacher can use in one lesson, a coach can see in a walkthrough, and a team can name in a Coaching Sprint. Across the 13 Anchors, there are 52 Simple Strategies.

> **Priority Anchors give a school one shared direction.**
>
> When leaders, coaches, and teachers all work on the same Anchor, PD, walkthroughs, PLCs, and coaching point the same way, and teachers aren't pulled in five directions at once. In a team Sprint, the Priority Anchor is where Step 1 begins.

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SECTION 2

How a School Chooses Its Priority Anchors

Leaders and coaches choose Priority Anchors from schoolwide evidence: walkthrough patterns, common assessment results, student work, and what teams report in PLCs. Look for the practice that shows up as a need across the building.

Decision Guide: Is the Pattern Schoolwide?

1/2+

Half or more of classrooms

Schoolwide priority. Make it a Priority Anchor.

1/3 to 1/2

A third to half of classrooms

Team or cluster need. Use a team Sprint or a Targeted Skill Group.

< 1/3

Fewer than a third

Individual need. Use 1:1 coaching with the Simple GrowthPath™.

These cutoffs are a Simply Coaching decision guide. They give leaders a clear line so they can decide and move forward.

Choose one or two.

More than two splits the building's attention, and nothing gets the time it needs to take hold.

Start with Readiness when needed.

If classrooms aren't yet calm and predictable, start with a Readiness Anchor, because learning can't happen in chaos.

Anchors stack.

When an Anchor is in place, the school sustains it and adds the next one. A finished Anchor stays part of how the building works.

If Your School Hasn't Chosen Priority Anchors

1. **Start with the school improvement plan or building focus.** Choose the Anchor that best aligns with it.
2. **If there isn't a building focus, use your team's evidence.** Look at walkthrough notes, common assessments, and student work together.
3. **Agree on one Anchor together.** Aim for one look and one sound across every classroom, and share your choice with your school leader.

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SECTION 3

How Priority Anchors Connect to a Team Sprint

In a team Sprint, Step 1 starts with the Anchor and moves through four parts.

1

Talk Through the Anchor

What it is, why it was chosen, and what it looks like in a classroom when it's strong.

2

Name the Strategy

The Simple Strategy from that Anchor that the team will use.

3

Establish the Baseline

Walkthrough data on the strategy, or a walkthrough the team sets up to collect it.

4

Name the Focus

The pattern across classrooms that the team will work on inside the Anchor.

Anchors are for teams. Simple GrowthPath™ is for individual teachers.

Priority Anchors guide Collaborative Teams and Targeted Skill Groups. When a need shows up in only a few classrooms, it's individual work, and it runs through a 1:1 Sprint with Simple GrowthPath™.

- **A teacher can be in both at once:** working on the school's Priority Anchor with their team, and on their own Simple GrowthPath™ driver with the coach.

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SECTION 4

The 13 Anchors at a Glance

INSTRUCTIONAL READINESS

The conditions that let students begin, participate, and stay engaged in learning.

01

Classroom Environment and Routines

Students access materials, begin work, and move between activities without losing time.

02

Classroom Culture and Relationships

Students feel they belong, share ideas, and take risks in learning.

03

Behavior Management and Self-Regulation

Teachers set expectations, prevent problems, and help students regulate and rejoin learning.

INSTRUCTIONAL IMPACT

The teaching practices that move grade-level learning forward.

04	**Curriculum Internalization and Lesson Planning**	Teachers understand the curriculum (HQIM) and prepare the intended grade-level task before teaching it.
05	**Explicit Instruction and Gradual Release**	Teachers teach new learning in a clear sequence, make their thinking visible, and guide practice before students work alone.
06	**Academic Discourse and Questioning**	Students explain their reasoning and build on one another's ideas through planned questions and structured talk.
07	**Academic Vocabulary**	Students learn and use the language they need to understand and express ideas in every subject.
08	**Writing Across the Curriculum**	Students write to process content, explain their reasoning, and show understanding in every subject.
09	**Metacognition and Student Ownership**	Students plan an approach, monitor their progress, and reflect on what comes next.
10	**Practice and Retrieval**	Students recall and apply learning over time so they can use it again.
11	**Differentiation and Scaffolding**	Teachers adjust supports and grouping while preserving grade-level learning.
12	**Formative Assessment and Feedback**	Teachers use evidence during and after instruction to respond and guide next steps.
13	**Rigorous Tasks and Application**	Students solve unfamiliar problems and apply what they learn to meaningful tasks.

There's no required order across the 13, with one exception: if classrooms aren't yet calm and predictable, start with a Readiness Anchor.

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INSTRUCTIONAL READINESS ANCHOR

01 Classroom Environment and Routines

Students access materials, begin work, and move between activities without losing time.

Choose This Anchor When You See

- Students waiting for materials or directions before they can start work
- Transitions that take several minutes, with the teacher repeating directions to restart the class
- Students who don't know what to do when they're stuck or finish early

Simple Strategies

5 STRATEGIES

Learning Space Configuration	Arrange the physical or virtual classroom, its furniture, and its learning zones to support specific lesson goals and student interactions.
Entry and Closure Routines	Open and close every lesson with a predictable routine that activates prior knowledge or collects evidence.
Transition Routine	Move students between activities, groups, or spaces with a taught cue, action, and readiness check.
Attention Signals	Use one consistent signal to regain whole-class focus, taught and reinforced all year.
Independent Work Routine	Post and teach what students do when they're stuck, finish early, or need help.

OUR EVIDENCE FOR THIS ANCHOR

PUT THIS ANCHOR INTO PRACTICE

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INSTRUCTIONAL READINESS ANCHOR

02 Classroom Culture and Relationships

Students feel they belong, share ideas, and take risks in learning.

Choose This Anchor When You See

- The same few students answering while most stay quiet
- Students who won't share an idea unless they're sure it's right, or who laugh at mistakes
- Students who have no adult in the building they connect with

Simple Strategies

4 STRATEGIES

Classroom Agreements	Build shared expectations with students and use them as the neutral reference point for redirection.
Community Circles	Run a structured sharing routine with a facilitation protocol and low-risk prompts.
Relationship Mapping	List every student, note which adults connect with each one, and plan outreach for students with no connection.
Positive Narration	Describe aloud what students are doing right to reset the room without calling out misbehavior.

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INSTRUCTIONAL READINESS ANCHOR

03 Behavior Management and Self-Regulation

Teachers set expectations, prevent problems, and help students regulate and rejoin learning.

Choose This Anchor When You See

- The same reminders given again and again, with behavior interrupting instruction
- Expectations that change from activity to activity or from room to room
- Redirection that escalates instead of getting students back to learning

Simple Strategies

4 STRATEGIES

Activity Expectations	State the conversation, help, movement, and participation expectations before each activity begins.
Precorrection	Anticipate a likely misstep and prompt the expected behavior in neutral language right before it happens.
Behavior-Specific Praise	Name the exact behavior a student or the class showed and why it helps learning.
Reset Routines	When a routine is missed, pause the class, re-model the routine, practice it, and move on in a neutral tone.

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INSTRUCTIONAL IMPACT ANCHOR

04 Curriculum Internalization and Lesson Planning

Teachers understand the curriculum (HQIM) and prepare the intended grade-level task before teaching it.

Choose This Anchor When You See

- Teachers reading the lesson for the first time as they teach it
- Curriculum tasks swapped out or watered down, so students rarely do the grade-level work the curriculum intends
- Learning targets posted on the board that students can't explain

Simple Strategies

5 STRATEGIES

Unit Internalization	Study the whole unit and its assessment to know where lessons are headed and what students must be able to do.
Lesson Internalization	Work the lesson's tasks, write the exemplar, rehearse key explanations, and plan the checks before teaching.
Learning Targets and Success Criteria	State what students will learn and what quality looks like, then return to both during and after the lesson.
Lesson Hooks	Open with a question, image, or problem that creates a knowledge gap students want to close.
Anticipating Misconceptions	Predict the errors students are likely to make and plan the response before the lesson.

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INSTRUCTIONAL IMPACT ANCHOR

Explicit Instruction and Gradual Release

Teachers teach new learning in a clear sequence, make their thinking visible, and guide practice before students work alone. Includes direct instruction and I Do, We Do, You Do.

Choose This Anchor When You See

- Students sent to independent work who can't get started
- New content explained without modeling, so students never see the thinking
- Little or no guided practice between the teacher's explanation and independent work

Simple Strategies

5 STRATEGIES

Modeling and Think-Alouds	Demonstrate a process and make the decisions, reasoning, and error correction visible.
Worked Examples	Guide students to examine and explain a completed solution before attempting their own.
Visual and Concrete Representations	Use manipulatives, diagrams, or models chosen for the concept to make an abstract idea tangible.
Concept Mapping	Have students build a diagram of key ideas and label the relationships between them (teacher-scribed in K-2, student-built in grades 3-12).
Guided Practice	Support students as they attempt new learning, with prompts and feedback before independent work.

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INSTRUCTIONAL IMPACT ANCHOR

06 Academic Discourse and Questioning

Students explain their reasoning and build on one another's ideas through planned questions and structured talk.

Choose This Anchor When You See

- Mostly recall questions with one-word answers
- The teacher doing most of the talking, with the same few students answering
- Students who give answers but can't explain their reasoning or build on a classmate's idea

Simple Strategies

5 STRATEGIES

High-Level Question Planning	Write a small set of reasoning questions in advance and decide when to ask them.
Wait Time	Pause three to five seconds after asking a question and again after a student answers.
Cold Calling	Ask the question, give think time, then call on a student by name so every student is accountable for thinking.
Think, Pair, Share	Students think alone, talk with a partner, then share with the class.
Evidence-Based Discussion	Students make claims, cite evidence, and build on classmates' reasoning, using sentence stems.

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INSTRUCTIONAL IMPACT ANCHOR

Academic Vocabulary

Students learn and use the language they need to understand and express ideas in every subject.

Choose This Anchor When You See

- Students who avoid or misuse key content words when they speak or write
- Vocabulary taught as a list, separate from the content
- Students who stall on texts and test questions because of unfamiliar academic language

Simple Strategies

4 STRATEGIES

Vocabulary in Context	Explicitly teach essential words inside the content, then use context to develop, apply, and verify meaning.
Frayer Model	Define a word by its characteristics, examples, and non-examples, with students explaining in their own words.
Concept Sorts	Sort words or examples into categories and justify the groupings.
Word Part Analysis	Break a word into roots and affixes, propose a meaning, and verify it in context.

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INSTRUCTIONAL IMPACT ANCHOR

08 Writing Across the Curriculum

Students write to process content, explain their reasoning, and show understanding in every subject.

Choose This Anchor When You See

- Students who rarely write outside of ELA
- Written answers that are a single word or number with no explanation
- Students who can talk through an idea but struggle to explain it in writing

Simple Strategies

3 STRATEGIES

Quick Writes	Students write for two to five minutes in response to a prompt, and the teacher uses the writing to plan next steps.
Write to Explain	Students write how they solved a problem or why something is true.
Claim, Evidence, Reasoning	Students state a claim, support it with evidence, and explain how the evidence supports the claim.

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INSTRUCTIONAL IMPACT ANCHOR

09 Metacognition and Student Ownership

Students plan an approach, monitor their progress, and reflect on what comes next.

Choose This Anchor When You See

- Students who can't say what they're working toward or how they're doing
- Students who wait for the teacher to tell them whether their work is right
- The same mistakes repeated without students noticing

Simple Strategies

3 STRATEGIES

Student Goal Setting and Monitoring	Students set a mastery goal, name the actions to reach it, and track their progress against evidence.
Self-Assessment and Reflection	Students judge their work against criteria and reflect on what helped, what was hard, and what comes next.
Self-Monitoring Checklists	Students track their own task completion or behavior on a taught checklist as they work.

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INSTRUCTIONAL IMPACT ANCHOR

10 Practice and Retrieval

Students recall and apply learning over time so they can use it again.

Choose This Anchor When You See

- Students who seem to master a skill, then forget it a few weeks later
- Review that happens only right before a test
- Practice that covers one problem type at a time and never mixes them

Simple Strategies

3 STRATEGIES

Retrieval Practice	Students pull learning from memory through ungraded quizzes, brain dumps, or questions, then check and correct their answers.
Spaced and Mixed Practice	Revisit learning at planned intervals, and mix problem types once students have basic mastery.
Choral Response	The whole class answers on cue, always paired with an individual check.

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INSTRUCTIONAL IMPACT ANCHOR

11 Differentiation and Scaffolding

Teachers adjust supports and grouping while preserving grade-level learning.

Choose This Anchor When You See

Some students who can't access the grade-level task, and others who finish early with nothing to deepen it	Supports that stay in place long after students need them, or that replace the grade-level task entirely	Groups that stay the same all year, whatever the current evidence shows

Simple Strategies

3 STRATEGIES

Scaffold and Fade	Name the barrier, add a temporary support that holds rigor, and reduce it as evidence shows students gaining independence.
Chunking and Sequencing	Break complex content into ordered segments and check understanding before connecting them.
Targeted Small Group Instruction	Pull a short-term group for a shared need shown in current evidence, then teach, check, and regroup.

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INSTRUCTIONAL IMPACT ANCHOR

12 Formative Assessment and Feedback

Teachers use evidence during and after instruction to respond and guide next steps. Includes checking for understanding (CFU).

Choose This Anchor When You See

- Teachers finding out students didn't learn it only after the quiz or test
- Lessons that move on whether or not students understood
- Feedback that's a grade or "good job," with no revision afterward

Simple Strategies

5 STRATEGIES

Hinge Questions	At a decision point, ask a planned question whose wrong answers reveal specific misconceptions, with every student responding on whiteboards or cards.
Active Monitoring	Circulate with a plan for what to look for, gather evidence while students work, and respond with a prompt or feedback.
Exit Tickets	Collect a short task at the close of the lesson, sort the responses (got it, almost, not yet), and plan the next instructional response.
Error Analysis	Students examine an error, explain the reasoning behind it, and correct it, starting with anonymous examples.
Feedback to Action	Give focused feedback, have students apply it, and check the revision.

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INSTRUCTIONAL IMPACT ANCHOR

13 Rigorous Tasks and Application

Students solve unfamiliar problems and apply what they learn to meaningful tasks.

Choose This Anchor When You See

- Tasks that mostly ask students to recall or follow steps
- Students who struggle when a problem looks different from the examples
- Students who complete the work but can't apply the learning to a new situation

Simple Strategies

3 STRATEGIES

Task Rigor Check	Evaluate the thinking a task requires, then revise the task or protect that demand before assigning it.
Structured Problem Solving	Teach students a repeatable process to understand a problem, plan, work it, and evaluate the solution.
Guided Investigation	Pose a bounded question, teach the needed background, and support students with checkpoints as they gather evidence and reach a conclusion.

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SECTION 5 · LEADERSHIP TEAM TOOL

Questions to Guide the Choice

Use these with your leadership team, or with your grade-level team if the school hasn't chosen yet.

1	What pattern shows up in half or more of our classrooms?
2	Are classrooms calm and predictable enough for learning, or do we need to start with Readiness?
3	Which Anchor connects most directly to our school improvement plan or building focus?
4	What do our walkthroughs, common assessments, and student work show, apart from what we assume?
5	If we got this one Anchor strong this year, what would change for students?
6	Which Anchors are already in place and need to be sustained as we add the next one?
7	How will we know it's working? What evidence will we look at, and when?

OUR PRIORITY ANCHOR(S) THIS YEAR

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YOUR NEXT STEP

You've Chosen Your Anchor. Now Take It Into the Hub.

The Simple Strategy Hub has the strategies for every Anchor and the training to put them into practice.

The Strategy Library
All 52 Simple Strategies, organized by Anchor. Each one comes with its Strategy Pack and two explainer videos: one for the coach and one to watch with the teacher.

Strengthen Instruction Training
Step-by-step training on the Coaching Sprint, starting with your Priority Anchor and moving through Plan, Act, and Reflect.

Coach Development Training
Grow your own coaching with Simple CoachPath™ training and activities.

Simple Insights Trainings
Short, focused PD videos you can watch between visits.

The Strategy Experience Builder
Turn any strategy into a 15, 30, or 60 minute PD session for your teachers.

Monthly Strategy Lab and Community
Bring the coaching question you are working on and think it through with other coaches.

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Just need one strategy?
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Bringing it to your whole school?
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Stronger instruction begins with simple strategies.

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