QUICK REFERENCE:

Pennsylvania Essential Practices for Districts
Quick Reference Guide

CONDITION:

Empower Leadership for District Continuous Improvement

District leadership establishes a vision for continuous improvement and cultivates a culture of collective responsibility to provide the conditions for all students to be college, career, and community ready. There is a shared commitment to collaboratively identify, plan, implement, monitor, evaluate, and communicate the conditions necessary to continuously improve student learning and outcomes.

EMPOWER LEADERSHIP FOR DISTRICT CONTINUOUS IMPROVEMENT

PRACTICE	GUIDING QUESTIONS	NOTES
Practice 1: Foster a vision and culture of high expectations for success for all stakeholders	• Have we defined a district vision that clearly articulates high expectations for all students, regardless of race, ethnicity, socioeconomic status, family background, or individual needs? • How do we ensure that all stakeholders understand and commit to attaining the vision of our district? How do we know it is working? • To what extent do our stakeholders believe in and trust our district leadership? Do we have a way to measure this? How do we know? • What actions do we take to build trust, shared responsibility, and a positive district culture? How do we know it is working?	

POTENTIAL SOURCES OF EVIDENCE

- ☐ District-wide vision statement
- ☐ Vision-specific communication materials
- ☐ Communications around improving outcomes for all students
- ☐ District meeting agendas and minutes
- ☐ Stakeholder surveys (e.g., board members, central office, school administrators, teachers, support staff, students, parents/guardians)
- ☐ Stakeholder focus groups (e.g., board members, central office, school administrators, teachers, support staff, students, parents/guardians)
- ☐ District and state assessment measures, by student group (e.g. achievement, growth)
- ☐ District on-track and college/career ready measures (e.g., attendance, early indicators of success, pass rates, credits and credit recovery, EL growth/attainment, graduation rates, industry-based learning, post-secondary transition to school/military/work, by student group)

PRACTICE	GUIDING QUESTIONS	NOTES
Practice 2: Establish and maintain a focused system for continuous improvement and ensure organizational coherence	• How do we work to understand the biggest district priorities and needs? What data informs this process and what do we do with it? • How do we develop our comprehensive plan and ensure our plan aligns to school needs and plans? • How do we monitor our plan implementation? How do we know if our plan is having the desired impact and what do we do next? • How do we organize central office and other support systems (e.g., local colleges/universities or other service organizations/agencies, Intermediate Unit, PaTTAN, etc.) to support schools? How do we align our efforts to ensure organizational coherence towards our vision and school needs? • How do we evaluate and continuously improve our efforts to ensure success for all students, educators, and families?	

POTENTIAL SOURCES OF EVIDENCE

☐ Current district comprehensive plan
☐ Current school improvement plans
☐ District data reports (e.g., ESSA Report Card, Future Ready PA Index; other attendance, behavior, academic, college and career readiness/on-track indicators, graduation rates, etc.)
☐ District data analysis protocols
☐ Planning processes/protocols
☐ District meeting agendas and minutes
☐ Stakeholder surveys (e.g., board members, central office, school administrators, teachers, support staff, students, parents/guardians)
☐ Stakeholder focus groups (e.g., board members, central office, school administrators, teachers, support staff, students, parents/guardians)
☐ Communication about organizational changes

For larger districts:
☐ *Central office organization chart*
☐ *Central office staff job descriptions*
☐ *Central office staff interviews*

EMPOWER LEADERSHIP FOR DISTRICT CONTINUOUS IMPROVEMENT

PRACTICE	GUIDING QUESTIONS	NOTES
Practice 3: Engage in meaningful two-way communication with stakeholders to establish and sustain shared responsibility for student learning across the district	• How do we involve multiple stakeholders in our district planning and implementation monitoring processes? How do we share information about progress, how often, and with whom (e.g., board, community, and district and school stakeholders)? • What opportunities do we provide to gather input from all district stakeholders and communicate information in a way that sustains shared responsibility for student learning across the district? • How do we incorporate family and community feedback into decision-making, and how do we communicate about this with stakeholders?	

EMPOWER LEADERSHIP FOR DISTRICT CONTINUOUS IMPROVEMENT

POTENTIAL SOURCES OF EVIDENCE

- ☐ District/school events calendars
- ☐ District/school websites
- ☐ District/school meeting agendas and minutes
- ☐ District/school planning documents (e.g., committee lists, processes for community engagement, board updates, etc.)
- ☐ District/school communication materials (e.g., district progress updates, follow up to feedback, etc.)
- ☐ Stakeholder surveys (e.g., board members, central office, school administrators, teachers, support staff, students, parents/guardians)
- ☐ Stakeholder focus groups (e.g., board members, central office, school administrators, teachers, support staff, students, parents/guardians)

Focus on Continuous Improvement of Instruction

District leadership ensures access to tools, systems, and structures to ensure effective, standards-aligned instructional programs that are evidence-based, differentiated, individualized, and informed by data-based planning and reflection.

PRACTICE	GUIDING QUESTIONS	NOTES
Practice 4: Ensure effective, standards-aligned curriculum and assessment	• Is it clear what all students should learn, know, and be able to do by grade-level and content-area? • Are all of our schools effectively using standards-aligned curriculum and assessments? How do we know? Where are there gaps? • How do we ensure educators implement curriculum and assessments effectively? What tools, resources, and supports do we offer? • How do we ensure all school leaders and teachers have access to high-quality curricular materials and standards-aligned assessment data? • To what extent do our schools regularly gather and assess data to understand student learning of the grade-level and content-area standards?	

POTENTIAL SOURCES OF EVIDENCE

- ☐ District curriculum and assessment documents (e.g., curriculum maps, assessment calendar, list of approved and aligned resources, etc.)
- ☐ District-led process/policies for curriculum audit/review
- ☐ School-level instructional materials (e.g., unit/lesson plans, formative assessments, etc.)
- ☐ Classroom, PLC and school visits
- ☐ District professional learning calendar
- ☐ School calendars and master schedules
- ☐ District and state assessment measures, by student groups (e.g. achievement and growth)
- ☐ District on-track and college/career ready measures (e.g., attendance, early indicators of success, pass rates, credits and credit recovery, EL growth/attainment, graduation rates, industry-based learning, post-secondary transition to school/military/work, by student group)
- ☐ Processes and protocols for analyzing school and district-wide assessment data
- ☐ Central office staff, school leader and school staff surveys
- ☐ Central office staff, school leader and school staff focus groups

FOCUS ON CONTINUOUS IMPROVEMENT OF INSTRUCTION

PRACTICE	GUIDING QUESTIONS	NOTES
Practice 5: Support schools in implementing evidence-based instructional strategies and programs to ensure all students have access to rigorous, standards-aligned instruction	• To what extent are all our schools providing rigorous, standards-aligned instruction to all students? How do we know? Where are gaps and needs? • How do we support schools in implementing high-impact instructional strategies and programming for all students? What tools, resources, and supports do we offer? • What supports and resources do we provide specifically to ensure that students with language development needs and/or special education needs can access grade-level, standards-aligned content? What impact are the supports and resources having on student progress and outcomes?	

FOCUS ON CONTINUOUS IMPROVEMENT OF INSTRUCTION

POTENTIAL SOURCES OF EVIDENCE

- ☐ District and state assessment measures, by student groups (e.g.. achievement and growth)
- ☐ District on-track and college/career ready measures (e.g., attendance, early indicators of success, pass rates, credits and credit recovery, EL growth/attainment, graduation rates, industry-based learning, post-secondary transition to school/military/work, by student group)
- ☐ Data analysis protocols
- ☐ Resources, supports, and plans for students with Individualized Education Programs (IEPs)
- ☐ Resources, supports, and plans for English Language Development (ELD)
- ☐ Professional learning materials and tools related to evidence-based instructional strategies
- ☐ Classroom and school visits (e.g., using aligned walkthrough/instructional rounds forms)
- ☐ Stakeholder surveys (e.g., central office, school administrators, teachers, support staff, students, parents/guardians)
- ☐ Stakeholder focus groups (e.g., central office, school administrators, teachers, support staff, students, parents/guardians)

PRACTICE	GUIDING QUESTIONS	NOTES
Practice 6: Build the capacity of central office and school building administrators as instructional leaders to effectively monitor, supervise, and support high-quality teaching and learning	• How do we define and develop instructional leadership? How do we create an environment that allows central office and school building administrators to build their capacity as instructional leaders? • How do we support principals with school-level planning and continuous improvement? • How do we develop school and district leaders' ability to strengthen teacher practice through high-quality PD, teacher feedback, and coaching? • How do we build the capacity of school-based staff to utilize data in a meaningful way to strengthen the quality of instruction?	

FOCUS ON CONTINUOUS IMPROVEMENT OF INSTRUCTION

POTENTIAL SOURCES OF EVIDENCE

- ☐ Documentation of district's vision of instructional leadership
- ☐ District comprehensive planning documents
- ☐ School improvement planning processes/protocols
- ☐ Differentiated professional development plan for school and district leaders
- ☐ Professional learning plans and materials
- ☐ Data analysis protocols
- ☐ Classroom visit protocols
- ☐ Schedule of individual conferencing with school leaders
- ☐ Schedule of individual and team conferencing with teachers
- ☐ Stakeholder surveys (e.g., central office, school administrators, teachers, support staff, students, parents/guardians)
- ☐ Stakeholder focus groups (e.g., central office, school administrators, teachers, support staff, students, parents/guardians)
- ☐ Classroom student growth data (e.g., teacher-specific growth data, benchmark assessment data, etc.)

Provide Student-Centered Supports to Ensure That All Students are Ready to Learn

District leadership supports school communities to remove barriers to learning and enhance opportunities for academic success, social and emotional development, and the health and wellness of all students. The district provides ongoing guidance and support to schools to maintain a positive climate conducive to learning.

	PRACTICE	GUIDING QUESTIONS	NOTES
PROVIDE STUDENT-CENTERED SUPPORTS	Practice 7: Coordinate and monitor supports aligned with students' and families' needs	• How do we identify student and family needs to match them to supports or resources in a timely manner? How do we support the whole child? • How do we prioritize support for our highest-need students and families? • How do we define the components of a positive school culture, ensuring all stakeholders feel welcome, safe, and supported? How do we communicate this to schools and to other stakeholders? • How do we use a variety of tools/approaches to reach and include all families as integral parts of our learning community? • How do we support schools to implement evidence-based family engagement strategies?	

POTENTIAL SOURCES OF EVIDENCE

☐ Data and data analysis protocols for student and family needs (e.g., academic, attendance, on-track, behavior, mental health, health and wellness, etc.)
☐ District/school websites, newsletters, and communications plans
☐ Staff/student/family handbooks
☐ Board-approved student policies (e.g., discipline, attendance, behavioral, mental health, health and wellness, Special Education, English Language Development, etc.)
☐ District professional learning materials related to student and family supports
☐ Building visits/walk-throughs
☐ District/school events calendars
☐ District and school plans for evidence-based strategies to increase family engagement
☐ Student and family support program/activity materials (e.g., for attendance, behavior, academics, mental health, health and wellness, etc.) highlighting a range of family engagement opportunities
☐ Stakeholder surveys (e.g., central office, school administrators, teachers, support staff, students, parents/guardians)
☐ Stakeholder focus groups (e.g., central office, school administrators, teachers, support staff, students, parents/guardians

PRACTICE	GUIDING QUESTIONS	NOTES
Practice 8: Partner with local businesses, employers, community organizations, and other agencies to meet the needs of the district	• How do we invite and involve community partners to support student success? • To what extent have we defined clear roles, scopes of work, and desired outcomes for our partnerships? • How do we assess partnership effectiveness and responsiveness to changing needs?	

PROVIDE STUDENT-CENTERED SUPPORTS

POTENTIAL SOURCES OF EVIDENCE

- ☐ District/school websites
- ☐ District community newsletter
- ☐ District/school events calendars
- ☐ District/partner meeting agendas/minutes
- ☐ District/partner plan and memos of understanding/contracts (e.g., health services community, social service organizations, business partners, industry employers, post-secondary programs)
- ☐ Stakeholder surveys (e.g., board members, central office, school administrators, teachers, support staff, students, parents/guardians)
- ☐ Stakeholder focus groups (e.g., board members, central office, school administrators, teachers, support staff, students, parents/guardians)

Implement Data-Driven Human Capital Strategies

The district implements and maintains a performance management system that maximizes the effectiveness of district leaders, teachers, and other staff to ensure optimal learning for all students. District leaders, school leaders, teachers, and support staff acquire, enhance, and refine the knowledge, skills and practices necessary to create and support high levels of learning for all students through high-quality, embedded professional learning opportunities.

PRACTICE	GUIDING QUESTIONS	NOTES
Practice 9: Recruit and retain fully credentialed, experienced and effective teachers	• How do we define "effective teachers"? • How do we recruit and retain highly-qualified teachers, especially to our highest-need schools? To what extent do we consistently fill talent needs? • How do we ensure we are recruiting and hiring from a diverse pool of teacher candidates that reflect the diversity of our district? • To what extent do we support schools leaders to be human capital managers, including to identify needs and make staffing decisions? What are potential barriers and opportunities to do this? • How do we retain effective teachers? Is it working? How do we know? • How do we implement an evaluation process that results in continued improvement in instructional effectiveness and ensures differentiated professional learning and growth for teachers?	

POTENTIAL SOURCES OF EVIDENCE

- ☐ District and school staffing data (e.g., teacher vacancies, turnover, positive retention, effectiveness, demographics, preparation program and certification data, observations, etc.)
- ☐ District recruitment and hiring plan, policies, and procedures
- ☐ Teacher job descriptions
- ☐ Teacher incentive program materials
- ☐ District-wide teacher retention plan
- ☐ Differentiated professional development plan
- ☐ Personnel evaluation materials
- ☐ School surveys and focus groups (e.g., principals, teachers, etc.)

IMPLEMENT DATA-DRIVEN HUMAN CAPITAL STRATEGIES

PRACTICE	GUIDING QUESTIONS	NOTES
Practice 10: Support the development, professional learning, and advancement of central office and school leaders and staff in alignment with district and school mission, vision, goals, and priorities	• How do we recruit and develop experienced and effective school leaders, especially to our highest-need schools? • How do we ensure we recruit and develop from a diverse pool of school leaders that reflect the diversity of our district? • How do we use a variety of data sources to identify districtwide and differentiated professional learning needs? • How do we create opportunities for differentiated professional learning? To what extent are professional learning opportunities consistently aligned to school and staff needs? • How do we monitor the effectiveness of professional learning? Does it positively impact student achievement? How do we know? • Do we provide leadership/career pathways, mentorship/coaching programs, or other avenues to increase teachers' and leaders' expertise and capacity? Are theses pathways effective and how do we know?	

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POTENTIAL SOURCES OF EVIDENCE

☐ District recruitment and hiring plan, policies, and procedures
☐ School leader job descriptions
☐ Criteria for selection of cooperating teachers, mentors, department and lead teachers, instructional/peer coaches, committee members, etc.
☐ School leader staffing data (e.g., demographics, retention, student achievement data, etc.)
☐ Student success data (e.g., assessments, on-track, college and career ready, etc.)
☐ Data analysis protocols
☐ Differentiated professional development plan and materials
☐ Samples of staff development goals
☐ Documentation of leadership/career pathways, mentorship programs, etc.
☐ Central office staff, school leader and school staff surveys
☐ Central office staff, school leader and school staff focus groups

Last revised November 2019.

Organize and Allocate Resources and Services Strategically and Equitably

The district is organized and allocates resources (money, staff, professional learning, materials, and additional support) to schools based on the analysis of a variety of data that is disaggregated by student groups to determine district and school needs. Fiscal resources from local, state, and federal programs are used strategically and equitably to achieve the district's goals and priorities.

PRACTICE	GUIDING QUESTIONS	NOTES
Practice 11: Allocate resources, including money, staff, professional learning, materials, and support to schools based on the analysis of a variety of data	• How do we ensure equity of resource allocation in support of student success? • How do we ensure resource allocations align with school needs? Do allocations prioritize the highest-need schools and student populations? • What data informs our resource allocation decisions? Who is involved in this process? • How do we monitor and revisit resource allocations? • How can schools access resources when unforeseen needs arise?	

POTENTIAL SOURCES OF EVIDENCE

- ☐ District/school budgets aligned to school and district needs
- ☐ Data to inform resource allocations (e.g., enrollment, class size, student/teacher ratio, school/support ratio, admin/teacher ratio, school performance data, etc.)
- ☐ Board-approved policies and district/school procedures for budgeting, staffing and resource allocations, etc.
- ☐ Systems and processes for review and approval of expenditures
- ☐ District leadership meeting agendas
- ☐ Master schedules/staff assignments
- ☐ Stakeholder surveys (e.g., board, district staff, principals, school staff, etc.)
- ☐ Stakeholder focus groups (e.g., board, district staff, principals, school staff, etc.)

ORGANIZE AND ALLOCATE RESOURCES AND SERVICES STRATEGICALLY AND EQUITABLY

PRACTICE	GUIDING QUESTIONS	NOTES
Practice 12: Coordinate fiscal resources from local, state, and federal programs to achieve the district's goals and priorities	• How do we coordinate fiscal resources from all funding sources to maximize impact on student success? • To what extent do we consistently spend state and federal funds in a timely and compliant manner? How do we know?	

<div align="left">ORGANIZE AND ALLOCATE RESOURCES AND SERVICES STRATEGICALLY AND EQUITABLY</div>

POTENTIAL SOURCES OF EVIDENCE

- ☐ District/school budgets
- ☐ District comprehensive plan
- ☐ Systems and processes for review and approve of expenditures
- ☐ District fiscal policies and procedures
- ☐ Local, state, and federal compliance reports
- ☐ Data to inform resource allocations (e.g., enrollment, class size, student/teacher ratio, school/support ratio, admin/teacher ratio, school performance data, etc.)
- ☐ District budget meeting agenda and minutes

Last revised November 2019.