

Appendix C. Pennsylvania Essential Practices for Districts

Indicators of Operational Implementation

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.

PRACTICE 1: Foster a vision and culture of high expectations for success for all students, educators, and families

LOOK-FORS:

- There is a documented district vision (e.g., via district websites, newsletters/handouts, and/or posters) that defines high expectations for learning and growth of all students, regardless of race, gender, ethnicity, language, disability, sexual orientation, family background and/or family income.
- There is evidence that district leadership works collaboratively with stakeholders that are representative of the district/community to develop and refine the district's vision (e.g., visioning committee list, community meeting minutes, community feedback to the vision, etc.).
- District leaders articulate the vision during all meetings and interactions with internal and external stakeholders to ensure all decisions align back to the district's vision.
- District leaders create systems for engaging parents/guardians and all community stakeholders in a shared responsibility for student and school success reflecting the district's vision.
- District and community stakeholders are aware of and understand the district's vision.
- District leaders cultivate a culture of professional norms for peer support, collaboration, and continuous learning, resulting in high levels of trust, shared responsibility, support, and growth-orientation among staff.
- The district/school community works actively to identify and revise/adjust policies, practices, and cultures that keep students of different backgrounds and races from achieving equitable outcomes.
- Measurable short- and long-term goals are clearly articulated for the district, as well as individual schools and student groups (especially students who are economically disadvantaged, students of color, students with disabilities, English Learners, and other student groups who are historically marginalized).
- District, school, and community stakeholders hold each other accountable for the success of all students, especially students who have historically experienced opportunity and achievement gaps.
- District, school, and community stakeholders have positive and trusting working relationships.

PRACTICE 2: Establish and maintain a focused system for continuous improvement and ensure organizational coherence

LOOK-FORS:

- District-wide data collection systems gather data on an array of metrics associated with student learning, including behaviors, attendance, assessment and academic data, college and career readiness and other on-track indicators (e.g., grade distribution, pass/fail rates, credit recovery), graduation rates, etc.
- The district gathers and reviews data that is aggregated and disaggregated in a variety of ways, including by individual student, student group, course, grade-level, content area, school and district-wide, etc.
- The data collection system is accessible to and utilized by district and school staff (e.g., according to formal and regular feedback structures and anecdotal feedback).
- District leadership regularly assesses the effectiveness and accessibility of the data systems through input from district and school staff.
- District leadership works collaboratively with stakeholders that are representative of the district/community to develop, implement, monitor, and evaluate a district comprehensive plan.
- Systems and processes to identify school needs are regularly and consistently implemented, including the identification of highest-needs schools.
- District planning documents and school improvement planning documents are intentionally aligned to ensure alignment to district's vision for continuous improvement.
- District and school planning documents include growth goals and achievement goals.
- Measurable short- and long-term goals are aligned to Future Ready interim targets for schools.
- District leadership maintains a consistent process for ensuring that the district's vision drives decisions and district- and school-level processes and practices. District policies and practices are aligned to the district's vision.
- A clear system has been developed to gather and analyze data on implementation and outcomes of the major components of the district's comprehensive plan.
- The district leadership team engages in formal, annual processes to review a variety of quantitative and qualitative data to assess progress toward the goals outlined in the district's comprehensive plan and make course-corrections based on data.
- District, school, and community stakeholders can articulate how the district's support aligns with school needs.
- District leadership and staff's roles and responsibilities related to supporting school improvement are clearly defined and communicated to district and school stakeholders.

For larger districts:

- *There is a documented organizational structure that efficiently and effectively organizes district staff to support schools.*
- *District leadership models continuous improvement practices by regularly gathering feedback and data on the quality of support available to schools (e.g., stakeholder surveys, focus groups, response time data, etc.) and adjust as needed in response to the feedback.*

PRACTICE 3: Engage in meaningful two-way communication with stakeholders to establish and sustain shared responsibility for student learning across the district

LOOK-FORS:

- There is evidence that families, students, and other stakeholders have meaningful opportunities to engage and contribute to the district's comprehensive planning, implementation, and monitoring processes.
- District leadership maintains a consistent process for evaluating the effectiveness of stakeholder engagement strategies and continuously improves upon engagement of stakeholders.
- District leadership formally and regularly communicates with multiple stakeholders about progress toward achieving district's goals for student learning (e.g., through district and school staff meetings, newsletters and website updates, board meetings, family/community meetings, media, etc.)
- District leadership provides regular and consistent opportunities for stakeholders across the district to engage in reciprocal communication with leaders (e.g., virtual or in-person opportunities for a two-way exchange of ideas).
- District leadership communicates how stakeholder feedback is incorporated into district decisions.
- Stakeholders believe they have opportunities to learn about district progress and provide input into district decisions.

CONDITION:

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 4: Ensure effective, standards-aligned curriculum and assessment

LOOK-FORS:

- District leaders design and implement a formal process for vetting and identifying high-quality, standards-aligned, culturally relevant curricula for all content areas and grade levels within the district.
- School leaders have access to a formal, organized bank of district-sanctioned evidenced-based programs, instructional resources, and assessments.
- There is a formal and regular monitoring process to evaluate each school's implementation of the district-sanctioned curricula in order to ensure rigorous and culturally relevant instruction in all schools (e.g., informed by school and classroom walkthroughs, principal conversations, student academic data demonstrating proficiency in prioritized standards, etc.).
- District leaders ensure school leaders and teachers have access to implementation support directly aligned to district-sanctioned curricula and the vision of the district.
- District leaders identify and hold schools accountable for administering rigorous, standards-aligned assessments in all content areas and grade levels.
- Assessments yield data that are easily accessible to educators and leaders, aggregated/disaggregated (e.g., by school, grade-level, content-area, class, student group, and individual student), and allows for analysis to inform instructional decisions.
- District and school calendars provide sufficient time for educators to teach, assess for learning, analyze data, and make decisions about re-teach needs and daily instructional decisions.
- The district supports schools with implementing tools and opportunities to understand student learning and progress through purposeful formative classroom assessments to inform programs and instruction.
- District leaders provide professional learning opportunities to school administrators to support their ability to consistently monitor, evaluate, and improve implementation of the curriculum and assessments.

PRACTICE 5: Support schools in implementing evidence-based instructional strategies and programs to ensure all students have access to rigorous, standards-aligned instruction

LOOK-FORS:

- District leaders have a strong understanding of the quality of instruction across the district, including any gaps in student subgroup performance, and use student outcome data to identify schools in need of additional instructional supports.
- There are formal systems and processes for monitoring, evaluating, and holding school leaders accountable to effectively implement evidence-based programs, instructional strategies, and assessments for all students.
- School leaders and educators have access to resources, tools, and model to better understand and implement district-sanctioned evidenced-based programs and instructional strategies.
- School and district leaders regularly identify teachers in need of additional instructional support and provides training targeted around specific evidence-based and standards-aligned instruction practices aligned to their needs.
- School leaders and staff express that the resources and training they receive help improve their implementation of evidence-based instructional strategies and programs in classrooms to ensure all students succeed.
- Systems for data collection at the school level include disaggregation by student group to ensure equitable access to rigorous, standards-aligned instruction and provide evidence of minimal gaps in student outcomes.
- There are resources and academic supports dedicated specifically to ensure all students have equitable access to evidence-based, standards-aligned instruction, including language development supports and supports for students with special education needs.

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

LOOK-FORS:

- District leadership defines a clear vision of what it means to be an instructional leader at the district and school level, reinforcing that all leaders are constantly learning and improving.
- School and district instructional leaders express clarity around their role in improving instruction and have a shared understanding of the specific actions instructional leaders should take to drive improvement at all levels.
- School and district instructional leaders set professional goals and demonstrate a commitment to continuously improve their knowledge, skills and expertise. School and district leaders can share how their instructional leadership has grown over time.
- District leaders regularly evaluate the effectiveness of district and school instructional leadership toward supporting high-quality teaching and learning (e.g., informed by student learning outcomes, overall school and district performance data, progress towards professional goals, etc.)
- District leaders use data on instructional leadership capacity to identify strengths and areas of need and to inform supports for district and school leaders.
- District leaders identify, and encourage others to seek out, research-based instructional leadership development opportunities for all district and school leaders.
- Professional learning opportunities for district and school leaders focus on providing high-quality feedback, coaching, and professional development to improve teacher's instructional practice and ability to support student academic needs, as well as barriers to learning (e.g., behavior and social-emotional needs).
- District leaders provide guidance, thought-partnership, and resources to school leaders and/or leadership teams to support and annual school improvement planning process.
- Annually, school leaders and/or leadership teams collaborate with district leaders to review data to understand specific school and student needs and develop goals and strategies to address those needs.
- School leaders and/or leadership teams work collaboratively with district leaders to monitor implementation of school-level plans and progress towards defined goals, as well as make course corrections as needed.
- There are formal protocols, structures, and tools for supporting school-level instructional leaders to analyze and utilize data to inform instructional decision-making (e.g., walkthrough forms, professional learning communities protocols, data dive materials, etc.).
- District and school leaders use student academic data to understand teachers' instructional needs and to provide aligned supports.
- District and school leaders learn from one another and develop innovative practices that maximize success of adults and students.

CONDITION:

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 7: Coordinate and monitor supports aligned with students' and families' needs

LOOK-FORS:

- District leadership has clearly defined the elements of a safe, supportive learning environment, including stakeholder engagement and inclusion; physical and emotional safety; and the physical, academic and disciplinary environment.
- There is a formal system for monitoring, evaluating, and supporting school leadership's capacity to implement the defined elements of a safe, supportive learning environment.
- District and school buildings maintain appropriate facilities, well-managed offices and classrooms, and make available supports to ensure access to all stakeholders.
- District leadership regularly communicates and celebrates efforts toward improving and maintaining safe, supportive learning environments with all district stakeholders.
- District-wide data collection systems gather data on a wide variety of metrics associated with whole-student needs (e.g., behavior, attendance, mental health, health and wellness, family needs, etc.).
- The district gathers and reviews data that is aggregated and disaggregated in a variety of ways, including by individual student, student group, course, grade-level, content area, school and district-wide, etc.
- The data system is accessible to and widely utilized by district and school staff, according to formal and regular feedback structures.
- District leadership regularly assesses the effectiveness and accessibility of the data systems through input from district and school staff.
- There is a formal, district-wide process for identification of individual student needs and connecting those students and families to supports to ensure a well-coordinated system of support for the whole child.
- This system is clearly and regularly communicated to all stakeholders, including students, families, community members, school level staff and central office staff. Stakeholders express understanding of this system.
- District leaders design and implement a formal process for identifying, vetting and approving community partners to provide services to meet the educational, physical, social and emotional needs of its students.
- District and school leaders and staff have access to high-quality, approved providers of support for students' educational, physical, social and emotional needs.
- There is a system for monitoring the quality and equity of student supports.
- There is a district-wide statement of philosophy regarding family engagement that supports and guides each school to develop their own plan for family engagement, based on the unique needs of their students and families.
- District leadership designs and provides regular formal opportunities for development and support for school level leaders to ensure effective and equitable implementation of evidence-based family engagement strategies.
- District leadership, in collaboration with a diverse array of community stakeholders, curates a bank of evidence-based family engagement strategies and documents to support school level implementation.
- District leaders and school level leaders regularly communicate the outcomes of family engagement strategies, goals for improvement and opportunities for stakeholder input.
- There is a system in place to monitor and evaluate family engagement at the district and school level.

PRACTICE 8: Partner with local businesses, employers, community organizations, and other agencies to meet the needs of the district

LOOK-FORS:

- The district has a plan for building and strengthening partnerships with local businesses, employers, community organizations, and other agencies that explicitly outlines the role of community partners in helping to achieve specific results.
- The district has several effective, strategic partnerships aligned to school and district needs and goals. These partnerships include documented, agreed-upon and defined partner roles, scope of work, and desired outcomes.
- Partners can articulate how their work aligns to school and district needs and goals.
- There is a formal and regular process for assessing partnerships and their impact on student/school success.
- Partnerships are held accountable to being responsive to changing needs.

CONDITION: 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 9: Recruit and retain fully credentialed, experienced and high-quality teachers

LOOK-FORS:

- The district collects, reviews, and monitors district-wide and school-level data related to its teaching workforce, including vacancies, turnover, positive retention, diversity, credentials/certifications, and effectiveness.
- There is a documented and structured system of recruiting and screening a diverse pool of potential teaching candidates, including passive recruitment strategies (e.g., website, job board, etc.) and proactive strategies (e.g., hiring fairs, partnerships/pipelines, etc.).
- District practices ensure that teachers are credentialed, effective, and experienced with the skills necessary to meet specific district and school needs through evidence-based practices.
- There are specific and documented efforts to place and retain credentialed, experienced, and effective teachers in the highest-need schools (e.g., priority placement, monetary or other incentives, mentorship and leadership opportunities, etc.).
- School leaders receive support during recruitment and hiring processes to identify individual school teacher workforce needs and select staff that meet those needs.
- District recruitment and hiring processes efficiently and effectively place teaching staff prior to the start of the school year and minimize vacancies.
- There is a documented and structured plan for monitoring and improving teacher retention strategies, especially in priority areas, to ensure high teacher retention districtwide.
- Personnel evaluation processes include multiple sources of information and data (e.g., student outcomes, classroom observations, progress towards professional goals, other artifacts of progress, etc.).
- Teachers understand their strengths and areas for improvement based on personnel evaluations.
- Personnel evaluation results are used to support ongoing teacher professional development.
- There is a formal system for gathering input from school leaders and teachers regarding the evaluation process, supporting district leaders to make the process as supportive as possible.

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

LOOK-FORS:

- The district collects, reviews, and monitors district-wide and school-level data related to school leadership, including vacancies, turnover, positive retention, diversity, credentials/certifications, and effectiveness.
- There is a documented and structured system of recruiting and screening a diverse pool of potential school leadership candidates, including internal development of promising teacher leaders and recruitment of credentialed, experienced, and effective external candidates.
- The district provides differentiated support, coaching, and development opportunities to school principals to develop school leadership capacity.
- Principals express having positive and supportive relationships with their principal supervisors/mentors.
- District leadership implements formal and regular systems and structures to gather data to understand overall staff development needs in the district (e.g., student academic data, staff effectiveness, stakeholder surveys, classroom walkthrough, other data related to district priorities, etc.).
- District and school leaders have formal conversations to identify district-wide and school-level staff professional development needs and to provide opportunities to fulfill those needs and align to district priorities.
- School-based staff have access to multiple high-quality professional learning opportunities through district-vetted and approved partners and/or provided by the district or school.
- District-provided opportunities for professional learning are aligned to district vision and differentiated to accommodate staff needs.
- Central office staff have, and are encouraged to seek out, opportunities to develop their professional skills in alignment with district priorities.
- District leaders support school leaders in developing a structured plan for school-based professional development aligned with district and school mission, vision, goals, priorities and staff needs.
- District leaders monitor multiple indicators and data sources in order to continuously improve the effectiveness of professional learning opportunities.
- There are formal pathways to leadership development, differentiated by specific areas of need, for district and school staff, such as specific pathways for teachers, teacher leaders/mentor teachers, school leadership roles, and district leadership roles.
- Staff are aware of leadership development pathways and what it takes to successfully progress.

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CONDITION:

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 11: Allocate resources, including money, staff, professional learning, materials, and support to schools based on the analysis of a variety of data

LOOK-FORS:

- There is a documented and systematic process for gathering a variety of disaggregated student data to inform decision-making around resource allocation across the district.
- District leaders, in collaboration with a variety of district stakeholders, develop and implement annual processes for determining resource allocation, prioritizing highest-need schools.
- School budget and staff allocations are equitable and aligned to school needs, as well as improvement and academic plans.
- Professional learning, programmatic and instructional materials, and district supports are equitably allocated and aligned to school needs, as well as improvement and academic plans.
- School leaders articulate how their resource allocations are aligned to school needs, as well as improvement and academic plans.
- Resource allocations are continuously evaluated and refined to improve district operations, ensure critical learning needs of students are met, and to support highest-need schools.
- School leaders can request and seek out additional or different resources throughout the year based on their needs, and the district accommodates requests when possible.

PRACTICE 12: Coordinate fiscal resources from local, state, and federal programs to achieve the district's goals and priorities

LOOK-FORS:

- District leaders have access to a complete and updated list of local, state, and federal funding sources.
- District leaders intentionally organize and align multiple funding sources to district goals, priorities, and needs.
- There are documented systems for directly aligning funding allocation to district goals and priorities, monitoring, and adjusting to ensure school and district needs are met.
- The district has a documented and ongoing process to evaluate and improve the use of fiscal resources and collaboration among programs and departments that are responsible for various funding sources.
- Systems for ensuring compliance with state and federal funds spending requirements are documented, implemented, and monitored for effectiveness.
- District leaders/staff understand what is required for state and federal funding source/grant compliance and seek additional information/support as needed to remain compliant.

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