

# Interview and Focus Group Questions

## Document Overview

This document is part of the Pennsylvania Essential Practices for Districts Self-Assessment toolkit. This question bank includes potential interview and focus group questions by stakeholder group for districts to use during the self-assessment process.

## Appendix E.1. Master Question Bank

Questions in this document are organized as follows:

- Introductory questions
- Empower Leadership for District Continuous Improvement
- Focus on Continuous Improvement of Instruction
- Provide Student-Centered Supports so That All Students are Ready to Learn
- Implement Data-Driven Human Capital Strategies
- Organize and Allocate Resources and Services Strategically and Equitably
- Closing questions

## Appendix E.2. Sample Questions by Stakeholder Group

Questions in this document mirror those in the master question bank but are organized by potential district stakeholder group and district functional areas.

- **Central Office Interviews/Focus Group Questions:**
  - District Functional Areas
    - Additional district leaders (e.g., Chief of Staff, Associate Superintendent, etc.)
    - Curriculum, Assessment, and Instruction
    - Talent/HR/Human Capital
    - Finance and Operations
    - Family and Student Supports/Community Partnerships
    - Equity
- **Stakeholder Focus Group Questions:**
  - School Board Representatives
  - Principals
  - Families
  - Students

# Guidance for Using these Questions in Focus Groups and Interviews

- **Districts do not need to ask all questions, ask them in the order that they appear, or ask them of every stakeholder.** These questions are recommendations to help districts gather evidence towards implementation of each essential practice.
- **Identify which stakeholders are best positioned to provide evidence regarding each essential practice** (e.g., Chief Financial Officer, or similar role, principals, and Board members can likely respond to questions related to budget and resource allocations; while families may not have information about district budgeting).
- **Customize questions based on the evidence gathered through other data sources and artifacts. Use focus groups and interviews to probe into areas where data reveal notable successes and challenges that require more in-depth exploration.** For example, if a review of survey data reveals that staff culture/trust is lacking districtwide, the district may want to focus on understanding the underlying “why” during focus groups/interviews.
- **Districts should customize and prioritize questions given their unique stakeholders.** Although, this guide specifies questions for specific functional areas and roles, districts should feel empowered to ask questions from any essential practice to any stakeholder depending on their unique function or role within the district.

## Appendix E.1.

# Master Question Bank

## Introductory Questions

- How would you summarize the strengths of the school/district?
- What are some areas for improvement?

## Empower Leadership for District Continuous Improvement

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

- What is the district's vision?
  - How does it address gaps in student achievement?
  - How does it set high expectations for student achievement, school and district performance?
- How was the vision developed? How is the vision communicated and shared with stakeholders?
- What actions has district leadership taken to build shared responsibility for achieving the vision?
- How does the district prioritize the success of all students?
  - What subgroup inequities/disproportionalities currently exist in the district? What contributes to these?
  - How does the district address any inequities/disproportionalities throughout the district? or In what ways does the district address any inequities/disproportionalities throughout the district?
  - How do district policies and practices acknowledge that some groups of students have less access to equitable educational opportunities? Can you provide an example of a specific policy or practice in place?
  - What intentional steps/actions/policies has the district taken to address these disparities in equitable educational opportunities?
- Do all staff believe that all students can succeed? How do you know? What policies and practices ensure that staff believe all students can succeed? or To what extent do all staff believe that all students can succeed?

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

- What are the district's current improvement priorities? How were they identified?
- What is the district's continuous improvement planning process? Who is involved? What is the timeline?
  - How are school needs considered in plan development?
  - Is this the right plan for the right time? Why or why not?
  - If the plan is implemented, what changes to inequitable student achievement outcomes do you anticipate?
  - Does the district have the capacity to implement the plan as designed?
- How is plan progress managed and monitored? Who, how, when/how often?
  - How is progress shared? With whom?

- What happens when data reveals that progress is not being made?
- What data and indicators does the district look at on a regular basis? How is this data review connected to the district's strategy?
- How often is data reviewed and what is the process for making adjustments to the plan?
- What are the strengths and areas of need of the district's current data management systems?
- What do you see as the primary function of central office? or Describe the role of the central office.
  - How does central office respond to the needs of schools?
  - What central office services are working to support schools? What central office services are barriers to schools getting what they need/focusing on the work?
- What is the management structure of the district? How does district leadership determine who reports to who and who is responsible for what work stream?
- Describe cross-functional or departmental collaboration in central office.
- How does the district office measure its effectiveness?
- How do schools/principals know how to get what they need from central office?

### **Practice 3: Engage in meaningful two-way communication with families, students, and other stakeholders to establish and sustain shared responsibility for student learning across the district**

- How and when does the district communicate with families and community stakeholders, and local governing bodies? About what (e.g., planning, plan progress, student outcomes, equity, etc.)?
  - How does the district share priorities and progress with families and community stakeholders?
  - How does the district ensure this information is accessible to all families and stakeholders? (i.e. available in native languages)
- How does the district solicit input and feedback from families and community stakeholders (e.g., annual surveys)?
  - Are there opportunities for two-way, reciprocal communications?
  - How does this input inform decision making?
- How does the district communicate with and solicit input from school-based staff?
  - How does the district share priorities and progress with school staff?
  - How does this input inform decision making?

## **Focus on Continuous Improvement of Instruction**

### **Practice 4: Ensure effective, standards-aligned curriculum and assessment**

- To what extent do all schools utilize high-quality, standards-aligned curriculum, instructional materials, and assessments in all content areas and grade-levels? How do you know?
- How are high-quality curricular resources and assessments selected? Can schools choose/create their own curricular resources and assessments?
- How does the district support schools with using high-quality curricular resources and assessments? What happens if schools aren't implementing these resources or struggle to implement them?

- How does the district report and utilize student assessment data?
- Is data disaggregated by student group? How is it disaggregated?
- Who has access to data?
- What are district expectations/protocols for analyzing student assessment data?
- What are the strengths and weaknesses of the district's system for reporting student assessment data?

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

- What is the instructional vision/focus of the district? What are the current district-wide instructional priorities? How were these developed/determined?
- Are there specific evidenced-based instructional strategies and programs that all schools should be using? If so, how are these identified? Where are you seeing schools needing support?
- How does the district support schools to effectively implement evidence-based instructional strategies and programs?
- How would you characterize the quality of instruction in your district? What are the district's strengths and areas for improvement pertaining to its academic programming?
- How is the district monitoring gaps in student outcomes? Are there gaps (e.g., for students with disabilities, English-language learners, historically disadvantaged student populations)?
  - How is the district working to close opportunity and achievement gaps?
  - What do you see as barriers to closing these gaps?
- What district supports or resources exist to support school staff in ensuring all students with special education and language development needs have access to rigorous, standards-aligned instruction?
- Are the district's procedures for assessing students, developing IEPs and providing and coordinating services for special needs and ELL students meeting both legal standards and families' expectations? What gaps exist?
- Are the district's procedures and supports meeting the needs of English language learners or students with disabilities/exceptionalities? How do you know?

## **Practice 6: District leadership builds the capacity of central office and school building administrators as instructional leaders to effectively monitor, supervise, and support high-quality teaching and learning**

- How does the district define instructional leadership? Who are the district's instructional leaders?
- How does the district instill a commitment to continuous improvement of instruction?
  - How are principals held accountable for student achievement?
  - How do you know if schools are effectively providing high-quality instruction for all students?
- How are school improvement plans developed and monitored for implementation and impact? How do schools measure and monitor their progress?
  - What indicators do they look at?
  - What data or processes are used to identify root causes of low performance?
  - How does the district support principals with school-based planning?
  - How are principals held accountable for implementing their plan?
- Describe how schools are managed. What does principal support and management look like in this district?
  - How does communication flow between principals, supervisors, and central office regarding school needs?

- Are these relationships positive and supportive?
- How does the district develop the instructional leadership capacity of principals and central office staff?
- How does the district support principals to develop teachers' capacity (e.g., through PD, feedback, coaching, PLCs, etc.)?
- How does the district build school-level capacity to use data to inform instruction?
  - What are the district expectations for teachers to use data to inform instruction?
  - How is timely access to data to schools ensured?
  - How is time for this built into school/teacher schedules?
  - What data analysis guidance, protocols, and schedules does the district provide?
  - Do central office and school staff have the capacity to make effective decisions based on the results of their data analysis? What is working? Are there gaps?

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

### **Practice 7: Coordinate and monitor supports aligned with students' and families' academic, physical, social, and emotional needs**

- In what ways does the district use data to drive decisions about the needs of specific schools, students and families?
  - What types of data does the district review? Who does this and how often?
  - Is this data accessible to both district and school staff?
- Does the district implement a multi-tiered system of supports to identify and connect students and families to supports? How does this process work?
- What support services (e.g. counseling, guidance, social work, health services, etc.) does the district provide (directly or in partnership) to support student readiness to learn?
  - What supports or resources does the district provide to schools regarding positive behavior support?
  - How does the district support student attendance and academic needs?
  - How does the district support students' mental health, health, and wellness needs?
- How do you track whether students are on track to graduate? What opportunities are available for remediation? For acceleration/enrichment?
- How are supports and resources differentiated for schools or students based on identified needs? (e.g. staffing allocations, hiring practices, wraparound services for students and families, partnerships for additional or specialized counseling, social work, health services, etc.)
  - How are resources allocated to ensure students who have had less educational opportunities are prioritized?
- How does the district support schools to promote a positive school culture for all students and families?
- How is the district currently engaging families and community members?
- How is the district supporting schools in engaging family and community members?
- How does the district monitor and improve family and community engagement?

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

- What partnerships does the district have with businesses, employers, community organizations, or other agencies?
- How do these partnerships align with district and school needs and priorities?
- What is the process for initiating and developing community partnerships?
  - How are roles and responsibilities/scopes of work developed?
- How is the district monitoring the impact of these partnerships?
  - Are desired outcomes defined and reviewed?
- Can you give an example of a partnership shifting its role in response to changing needs?
- Are there additional district needs that partnerships could help address? Are there specific partnerships you would be interested in seeing come to life?

## Implement Data-Driven Human Capital Strategies

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

- What is the district's teacher recruitment strategy and process? To what extent is the district able to hire and retain a diverse pool of credentialed, experienced, and effective teachers?
  - How does the recruitment process ensure availability of high-quality candidates?
  - How does the district recruit a diverse candidate pool?
  - In what ways/areas does the district struggle to find quality candidates?
  - How does the staffing/hiring timeline support the district's ability to fully staff schools for the 1st day of the school year?
- How does the district prioritize hiring and placement of experienced, credentialed, and effective teachers at high-need or low-performing schools? What are examples of this?
- Describe how the district works with principals to identify and address staffing needs and fill open positions.
  - What authority do principals have to hire the staff for their building?
- Describe the evaluation process for teachers.
  - To what extent do teachers find evaluation processes supportive in understanding their strengths and opportunities for development?
  - How is evaluation data used to inform decision making and support to teachers?
- How does the district work to retain high-performing staff?
  - How does the district support retention at the highest-need schools?
  - How do district policies support the removal of low performing staff?
- Describe the district's relationship with collective bargaining units.
  - How does this help/hinder the hiring process?
- What is the district's greatest challenge in recruiting, hiring, developing and retaining talented staff?

## **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 does the district recruit high-quality and experienced school leaders?
  - How does the recruitment process ensure availability of high-quality candidates?
  - How does the district recruit a diverse candidate pool?
  - In what ways/areas does the district struggle to find quality candidates?
- How does the district internally identify and develop potential school leaders (e.g., principals, APs, department chairs, etc.)?
- How does the district help build the leadership capacity of its principals? What opportunities do principals have for professional learning, coaching, networking, etc.?
- Are there formal leadership pathways for teachers? For leaders? For central office staff?
  - How are individuals identified, selected, and progressed through these pathways?
- How does the district support the professional learning of all staff (e.g., district or partner provided PD, coaching, PLC support, etc.)?
  - What additional support is provided to new teachers and staff?
- What is the focus/topics of district-provided PD? Why and how was this determined?
  - How is district PD differentiated to meet staff needs?
- How does the district monitor the impact and effectiveness of professional learning opportunities?

## **Organize and Allocate Resources and Services Strategically and Equitably**

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

- Describe the school and district budget process and timeline.
  - How are funds allocated?
  - How are schools and school needs prioritized during the budget process?
  - How are stakeholders engaged during the budget process? Who and how?
  - How does the district ensure the budget process is clear and transparent to schools? to the community? to the board?
  - What happens when unforeseen needs arise? Are there opportunities to adjust budget allocations during the year? How and when would this happen?
- How are flexible Title funds used strategically to address student needs? How are flexible Title funds used/allocated at the school-level?
  - What level of discretionary authority do principals have over their budgets?
  - In what ways can principals allocate resources to meet school needs?
  - In what ways are principals restricted in the budgeting process?
  - Do principals understand the budgeting process and their allowances and restrictions? or How are these authorities and restrictions communicated with principals?



- How are staffing allocations determined?
  - How does the district anticipate/project staffing needs?
  - What data informs staffing allocations?
  - Who makes these decisions? Who else provides input?
  - Is there an annual process?
- How are program and instructional materials allocated to schools?
  - What data is used?
  - Who makes these decisions? Who else provides input?
- How do district staff allocate their time to schools?
  - What data is used?
  - Who makes these decisions? Who else provides input?
- Does the district employ any strategies to prioritize funding, staffing, and materials resources the highest needs schools and students?
- What happens if a school experiences an unforeseen resource need? Can they ask for additional resources mid-year or when needs arise? What does this process look like?

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

- What grants or other external funding sources does the district pursue?
  - What determines which grants or funding sources the district applies for?
  - How is funding consistent or supportive of district priorities/strategies?
- How is the district strategic in seeking out and coordinating/aligning multiple funding sources to meet school and district needs? Share examples.
- Is the district currently in compliance with local, state, and federal funding requirements? Why or why not?

## **Closing Questions:**

- What is one recommendation for the district for the short-term? For the long-term?
- Is there anything else we should know as we close and speak to other stakeholder groups? Is there anything else we should have asked?

## Appendix E.2.

# Sample Questions by Stakeholder Group

## Central Office Interviews/Focus Groups

<p><b>Central Office Functional Area:</b> District Leaders</p> <p><b>Potential Related Roles:</b> Chiefs, Assistant Superintendents, or other similar district leadership roles</p>	
<p><b>Introductory Questions</b></p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• How would you summarize the strengths of your school/district?</li> <li>• What are some areas for improvement?</li> </ul>	
<p><b>Essential Practice(s)</b></p>	
<p><i>Practice 1</i></p>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• What is the district’s vision?               <ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>○ How does it address gaps in student achievement?</li> <li>○ How does it set high expectations for student achievement, school and district performance?</li> </ul> </li> <li>• How was the vision developed? How is the vision communicated and shared with stakeholders?</li> <li>• What actions has district leadership taken to build shared responsibility for achieving the vision?</li> <li>• To what extent do all staff believe that all students can succeed?</li> </ul>
<p><i>Practice 2</i></p>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• What are the district’s current improvement priorities? How were they identified?</li> <li>• What is the district’s continuous improvement planning process? Who is involved?               <ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>○ How are school needs considered in plan development?</li> <li>○ Is this the right plan for the right time? Why or why not?</li> <li>○ If the plan is implemented, what changes to inequitable student achievement outcomes do you anticipate?</li> <li>○ Does the district have the capacity to implement the plan as designed?</li> </ul> </li> <li>• How is plan progress managed and monitored?               <ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>○ How is progress shared? With whom?</li> <li>○ What happens when data reveals that progress is not being made?</li> </ul> </li> <li>• What data and indicators does the district look at on a regular basis? How is this data review connected to the district’s strategy?               <ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>○ How often is data reviewed and what is the process for making adjustments to the plan?</li> </ul> </li> <li>• What are the strengths and areas of need of the district’s current data management systems?</li> <li>• What do you see as the primary function of central office? or Describe the role of the central office.               <ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>○ How does central office respond to the needs of schools?</li> <li>○ What central office services are working to support schools? What central office services are barriers to schools getting what they need/focusing on the work?</li> </ul> </li> <li>• Describe cross-functional or departmental collaboration in central office.</li> <li>• How do schools/principals know how to get what they need from central office?</li> </ul>

### Practice 3

- How and when does the district communicate with families and community stakeholders, and local governing bodies? About what (e.g., planning, plan progress, student outcomes, equity, etc.)?
  - How does the district share priorities and progress with families and community stakeholders?
  - How does the district ensure this information is accessible to all families and stakeholders? (i.e. available in native languages)
- How does the district solicit input and feedback from families and community stakeholders (e.g., annual surveys)?
  - Are there opportunities for two-way, reciprocal communications?
  - How does this input inform decision making?
- How does the district communicate with and solicit input from school-based staff?
  - How does the district share priorities and progress with school staff?
  - How does this input inform decision making?

### Closing Questions

- What is one recommendation for the district for the short-term? For the long-term?
- Is there anything else we should know as we close and speak to other stakeholder groups? Is there anything else we should have asked?

### Central Office Functional Area: Curriculum, Assessment, Instruction

**Potential Related Roles:** Chief Academic Officer; principal supervisor(s); curriculum, assessment, and instruction leads; other similar positions/functions

### Introductory Questions

- How would you summarize the strengths of your school/district?
- What are some areas for improvement?

### Essential Practice(s)

#### Practice 4

- To what extent do all schools utilize high-quality, standards-aligned curriculum, instructional materials, and assessments in all content areas and grade-levels? How do you know?
- How are high-quality curricular resources and assessments selected? *Can schools choose/create their own curricular resources and assessments?*
- How does the district support schools with using high-quality curricular resources and assessments? What happens if schools aren't implementing these resources or struggle to implement them?
- How does the district report and utilize student assessment data?
  - Is data disaggregated by student group? How is it disaggregated?
  - Who has access to data?
  - What are district expectations/protocols for analyzing student assessment data?
  - What are the strengths and weaknesses of the district's system for reporting student assessment data?

*Practice 5*

- What is the instructional vision/focus of the district? What are the current district-wide instructional priorities? How were these developed/determined?
- Are there specific evidenced-based instructional strategies and programs that all schools should be using? If so, how are these identified? Where do schools need support?
- How does the district support schools to effectively implement evidence-based instructional strategies and programs?
- How would you characterize the quality of instruction in your district? What are the district's strengths and areas for improvement pertaining to its academic programming?
- How is the district monitoring gaps in student outcomes? Are there gaps (e.g., for students with disabilities, English-language learners, historically disadvantaged student populations)?
  - How is the district working to close opportunity and achievement gaps?
  - What do you see as barriers to closing these gaps?
- What district supports or resources exist to support school staff in ensuring all students with special education and language development needs have access to rigorous, standards-aligned instruction?
- Are the district's procedures for assessing students, developing IEPs and providing and coordinating services for special needs and ELL students meeting both legal standards and families' expectations? What gaps exist?
- Are the district's procedures and supports meeting the needs of English language learners or students with disabilities/exceptionalities? How do you know?

<p><i>Practice 6</i></p>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• How does the district define instructional leadership? Who are the district’s instructional leaders?</li> <li>• How does the district instill a commitment to continuous improvement of instruction? <ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>○ How are principals held accountable for student achievement?</li> <li>○ How do you know if schools are effectively providing high-quality instruction for all students?</li> </ul> </li> <li>• How are school improvement plans developed and monitored for implementation and impact? How do schools measure and monitor their progress? <ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>○ What indicators do they look at?</li> <li>○ What data or processes are used to identify root causes of low performance?</li> <li>○ How does the district support principals with school-based planning?</li> <li>○ How are principals held accountable for implementing their plan?</li> </ul> </li> <li>• Describe how schools are managed. What does principal support and management look like in this district? <ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>○ How does communication flow between principals, supervisors, and central office regarding school needs?</li> <li>○ Are these relationships positive and supportive?</li> </ul> </li> <li>• How does the district develop the instructional leadership capacity of principals and central office staff?</li> <li>• How does the district support principals to develop teachers’ capacity (e.g., through PD, feedback, coaching, PLCs, etc.)?</li> <li>• How does the district build school-level capacity to use data to inform instruction? <ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>○ What are the district expectations for teachers to use data to inform instruction?</li> <li>○ How is timely access to data to schools ensured?</li> <li>○ How is time for this built into school/teacher schedules?</li> <li>○ What data analysis guidance, protocols, and schedules does the district provide?</li> <li>○ Do central office and school staff have the capacity to make effective decisions based on the results of their data analysis? What is working? Are there gaps?</li> </ul> </li> </ul>
<p><i>Practice 7</i></p>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• How do you track whether students are on track to graduate? What opportunities are available for remediation? For acceleration/enrichment?</li> <li>• How does the district prioritize the success of all students? <ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>○ What subgroup inequities/disproportionalities currently exist in the district? What contributes to these?</li> <li>○ How does the district address any inequities/disproportionalities throughout the district?</li> <li>○ How do district policies and practices acknowledge that some groups of students have less access to equitable educational opportunities? Can you provide an example of a specific policy or practice in place?</li> <li>○ What intentional steps/actions/policies has the district taken to address these disparities in equitable educational opportunities?</li> </ul> </li> </ul>

### Closing Questions

- What is one recommendation for the district for the short-term? For the long-term?
- Is there anything else we should know as we close and speak to other stakeholder groups? Is there anything else we should have asked?

**Central Office Functional Area:** Talent/HR/Human Capital

**Potential Related Roles:** Chief Human Resources Officer, Chief Human Capital Officer, principal supervisor(s), or other similar roles

**Introductory Questions**

- How would you summarize the strengths of your school/district?
- What are some areas for improvement?

**Essential Practice(s)**

*Practice 9*

- What is the district’s teacher recruitment strategy and process? To what extent is the district able to hire and retain a diverse pool of credentialed, experienced, and effective teachers?
  - How does the recruitment process ensure availability of high-quality candidates?
  - How does the district recruit a diverse candidate pool?
  - In what ways/areas does the district struggle to find quality candidates?
  - How does the staffing/hiring timeline support the district’s ability to fully staff schools for the 1st day of the school year?
- How does the district prioritize hiring and placement of experienced, credentialed, and effective teachers at high-need or low-performing schools? What are examples of this?
- Describe how the district works with principals to identify and address staffing needs and fill open positions.
  - What authority do principals have to hire the staff for their building?
- Describe the evaluation process for teachers.
  - To what extent do teachers find evaluation processes supportive in understanding their strengths and opportunities for development?
  - How is evaluation data used to inform decision making and support to teachers?
- How does the district work to retain high-performing staff?
  - How does the district support retention at the highest-need schools?
  - How do district policies support the removal of low performing staff?
- Describe the district’s relationship with collective bargaining units.
  - How does this help/hinder the hiring process?
- What is the district’s greatest challenge in recruiting, hiring, developing and retaining talented staff?

<p><i>Practice 10</i></p>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• How does the district recruit high-quality and experienced school leaders? <ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>○ How does the recruitment process ensure availability of high-quality candidates?</li> </ul> </li> <li>• How does the district recruit a diverse candidate pool? <ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>○ In what ways/areas does the district struggle to find quality candidates?</li> </ul> </li> <li>• How does the district internally identify and develop potential school leaders (e.g., principals, APs, department chairs, etc.)?</li> <li>• How does the district help build the leadership capacity of its principals? <i>What opportunities do principals have for professional learning, coaching, networking, etc.?</i></li> <li>• Are there formal leadership pathways for teachers? For leaders? For central office staff? <ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>○ How are individuals identified, selected, and progressed through these pathways?</li> </ul> </li> <li>• How does the district support the professional learning of all staff (e.g., district or partner provided PD, coaching, PLC support, etc.)? <ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>○ What additional support is provided to new teachers and staff?</li> </ul> </li> <li>• What is the focus/topics of district-provided PD? Why and how was this determined? <ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>○ How is district PD differentiated to meet staff needs?</li> </ul> </li> <li>• How does the district monitor the impact and effectiveness of professional learning opportunities?</li> </ul>
<p><i>Practice 11</i></p>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• What level of discretionary authority do principals have over their budgets? <ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>○ In what ways can principals allocate resources to meet school needs?</li> <li>○ In what ways are principals restricted in the budgeting process?</li> <li>○ Do principals understand the budgeting process and their allowances and restrictions? or How are these authorities and restrictions communicated with principals?</li> </ul> </li> <li>• How are staffing allocations determined? <ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>○ How does the district anticipate/project staffing needs?</li> <li>○ What data informs staffing allocations?</li> <li>○ Who makes these decisions? Who else provides input?</li> <li>○ Is there an annual process?</li> </ul> </li> <li>• How do district staff allocate their time to schools? <ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>○ What data is used?</li> <li>○ Who makes these decisions? Who else provides input?</li> </ul> </li> <li>• Does the district employ any strategies to prioritize funding, staffing, and materials resources the highest needs schools and students?</li> <li>• What happens if a school experiences an unforeseen resource need? Can they ask for additional resources mid-year or when needs arise? What does this process look like?</li> </ul>

### Closing Questions

- What is one recommendation for the district for the short-term? For the long-term?
- Is there anything else we should know as we close and speak to other stakeholder groups? Is there anything else we should have asked?

## Central Office Functional Area: Finance and Operations

**Potential Related Roles:** Chief Financial Officer, Chief Operations Officer, or other similar roles

### Introductory Questions

- How would you summarize the strengths of your school/district?
- What are some areas for improvement?

### Essential Practice(s)

#### *Practice 11*

- Describe the school and district budget process and timeline.
  - How are funds allocated?
  - How are schools and school needs prioritized during the budget process?
  - How are stakeholders engaged during the budget process? Who and how?
  - How does the district ensure the budget process is clear and transparent to schools? to the community? to the board?
  - What happens when unforeseen needs arise? Are there opportunities to adjust budget allocations during the year? How and when would this happen?
- How are flexible Title funds used strategically to address student needs? How are flexible Title funds used/allocated at the school-level?
- How reliable are revenue and expense projections?
  - In what ways do projections impact the budget process?
  - What is prioritized with budget projections?
  - What challenges or barriers exist in ensuring reliable revenue and expense projections?
- What level of discretionary authority do principals have over their budgets?
  - In what ways can principals allocate resources to meet school needs?
  - In what ways are principals restricted in the budgeting process?
  - Do principals understand the budgeting process and their allowances and restrictions? or How are these authorities and restrictions communicated with principals?
- How are staffing allocations determined?
  - How does the district anticipate/project staffing needs?
  - What data informs staffing allocations?
  - Who makes these decisions? Who else provides input?
  - Is there an annual process?
- How are program and instructional materials allocated to schools?
  - What data is used?
  - Who makes these decisions? Who else provides input?
- Does the district employ any strategies to prioritize funding, staffing, and materials resources the highest needs schools and students?
- What happens if a school experiences an unforeseen resource need? Can they ask for additional resources mid-year or when needs arise? What does this process look like?



### Practice 12

- What grants or other external funding sources does the district pursue?
  - What determines which grants or funding sources the district applies for?
  - How is funding consistent or supportive of district priorities/strategies?
- How is the district strategic in seeking out and coordinating/aligning multiple funding sources to meet school and district needs? Share examples.
- Is the district currently in compliance with local, state, and federal funding requirements? Why or why not?

### Closing Questions

- What is one recommendation for the district for the short-term? For the long-term?
- Is there anything else we should know as we close and speak to other stakeholder groups? Is there anything else we should have asked?

**Central Office Functional Area:** Family and Student Supports/Community Partnerships

**Potential Related Roles:** Depends on the district — This interview/focus group should be with someone who can speak about how the district (a) supports multiple student and family needs (e.g., attendance, behavior, academics, health, mental health, social-emotional, etc.) and (b) engages families and the community, and (c) engages in strategic partnerships to meet needs.

### Introductory Questions

- How would you summarize the strengths of your school/district?
- What are some areas for improvement?

### Essential Practice(s)

<p><i>Practice 7</i></p>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• In what ways does the district use data to drive decisions about the needs of specific schools, students and families? <ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>○ What types of data does the district review? Who does this and how often?</li> <li>○ Is this data accessible to both district and school staff?</li> </ul> </li> <li>• Does the district implement a multi-tiered system of supports to identify and connect students and families to supports? How does this process work?</li> <li>• What support services (e.g. counseling, guidance, social work, health services, etc.) does the district provide (directly or in partnership) to support student readiness to learn? <ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>○ What supports or resources does the district provide to schools regarding positive behavior support?</li> <li>○ How does the district support student attendance and academic needs?</li> <li>○ How does the district support students' mental health, health, and wellness needs?</li> </ul> </li> <li>• How do you track whether students are on track to graduate? What opportunities are available for remediation? For acceleration/enrichment?</li> <li>• How does the district prioritize the success of all students? <ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>○ What subgroup inequities/disproportionalities currently exist in the district? What contributes to these?</li> <li>○ What intentional steps/actions/policies has the district taken to address these disparities in equitable educational opportunities?</li> <li>○ How do district policies and practices acknowledge that some groups of students have less access to equitable educational opportunities? Can you provide an example of a specific policy or practice in place?</li> </ul> </li> <li>• How are supports and resources differentiated for schools or students based on identified needs? (e.g. staffing allocations, hiring practices, wraparound services for students and families, partnerships for additional or specialized counseling, social work, health services, etc.) <ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>○ How are resources allocated to ensure students who have had less educational opportunities are prioritized?</li> </ul> </li> <li>• How does the district support schools to promote a positive school culture for all students and families?</li> <li>• How is the district currently engaging families and community members?</li> <li>• How is the district supporting schools in engaging family and community members?</li> <li>• How does the district monitor and improve family and community engagement?</li> </ul>
<p><i>Practice 8</i></p>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• What partnerships does the district have with businesses, employers, community organizations, or other agencies?</li> <li>• How do these partnerships align with district and school needs and priorities?</li> <li>• What is the process for initiating and developing community partnerships? <ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>○ How are roles and responsibilities/scopes of work developed?</li> </ul> </li> <li>• How is the district monitoring the impact of these partnerships? <ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>○ Are desired outcomes defined and reviewed?</li> </ul> </li> <li>• Can you give an example of a shift in partnership roles in response to changing needs?</li> <li>• Are there additional district needs that partnerships could help address? Are there specific partnerships you would be interested in seeing come to life?</li> </ul>

## Closing Questions

- What is one recommendation for the district for the short-term? For the long-term?
- Is there anything else we should know as we close and speak to other stakeholder groups? Is there anything else we should have asked?

## Central Office Functional Area: Equity

**Potential Related Roles:** Depends on the district — This interview/focus group should be with someone who can speak about how the district ensures that specific student groups have access to rigorous education, receive necessary supports, and progresses towards learning goals.

## Introductory Questions

- How would you summarize the strengths of your school/district?
- What are some areas for improvement?

## Essential Practice(s)

<i>Practice 1</i>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"><li>• What is the district’s vision?<ul style="list-style-type: none"><li>○ How does it address gaps in student achievement?</li><li>○ How does it set high expectations for student achievement, school and district performance?</li></ul></li><li>• Do all staff believe that all students can succeed? How do you know? What policies and practices ensure that staff believe all students can succeed? To what extent do all staff believe that all students can succeed?</li></ul>
<i>Practice 4</i>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"><li>• Does the district have standards and grade-level aligned curricular resources tailored to the needs of student groups?</li><li>• What assessments do you use to track student progress? Who looks at the data? How often? What happens as a result?</li></ul>
<i>Practice 5</i>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"><li>• What is the instructional vision/focus of the district? What are the current district-wide instructional priorities? How were these developed/determined?</li><li>• Are there specific evidenced-based instructional strategies and programs that all schools should be using? If so, how are these identified? Where are you seeing schools needing support?</li><li>• How does the district support schools to effectively implement evidence-based instructional strategies and programs?</li><li>• How would you characterize the quality of instruction in your district? What are the district’s strengths and areas for improvement pertaining to its academic programming?</li><li>• How is the district monitoring gaps in student outcomes? Are there gaps (e.g., for students with disabilities, English-language learners, historically underserved student populations)?<ul style="list-style-type: none"><li>○ How is the district working to close opportunity and achievement gaps?</li><li>○ What do you see as barriers to closing these gaps?</li></ul></li><li>• What district supports or resources exist to support school staff in ensuring all students have access to rigorous, standards-aligned instruction?</li></ul>

<i>Practice 7</i>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• In what ways does the district use data to drive decisions about the needs of specific schools, students and families? <ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>○ What types of data does the district review? Who does this and how often?</li> <li>○ Is this data accessible to both district and school staff?</li> </ul> </li> <li>• How does the district prioritize the success of all students? <ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>○ What subgroup inequities/disproportionalities currently exist in the district? What contributes to these?</li> <li>○ What intentional steps/actions/policies has the district taken to address these disparities in equitable educational opportunities?</li> <li>○ How do district policies and practices acknowledge that some groups of students have less access to equitable educational opportunities? Can you provide an example of a specific policy or practice in place?</li> </ul> </li> <li>• How are supports and resources differentiated for schools or students based on identified needs? (e.g. staffing allocations, hiring practices, wraparound services for students and families, partnerships for additional or specialized counseling, social work, health services, etc.) <ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>○ How are resources allocated to ensure students who have had less educational opportunities are prioritized?</li> </ul> </li> </ul>
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**Closing Questions**

- What is one recommendation for the district for the short-term? For the long-term?
- Is there anything else we should know as we close and speak to other stakeholder groups? Is there anything else we should have asked?

# Stakeholder Focus Groups

<b>School Board</b>	
<b>Introductory Questions</b>	
<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• How would you summarize the strengths of your school/district?</li> <li>• What are some areas for improvement?</li> </ul>	
<b>Essential Practice(s)</b>	
<i>Practice 1</i>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• What is the district’s vision? <ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>○ How does it address gaps in student achievement?</li> <li>○ How does it set high expectations for student achievement, school and district performance?</li> <li>○ How is the vision communicated and shared with stakeholders?</li> </ul> </li> <li>• What actions has district leadership taken to build shared responsibility for achieving the vision?</li> </ul>

<p><i>Practice 2</i></p>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• What are the district’s current improvement priorities? How were they identified?</li> <li>• How does the school board set goals?</li> <li>• How does the school board work with district leadership?</li> <li>• How would you describe the school board’s role and relationship with district leadership?</li> <li>• What is the district’s continuous improvement planning process? Who is involved? Timeline? <ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>○ How are school needs considered in plan development?</li> <li>○ Is this the right plan for the right time? Why or why not?</li> <li>○ If the plan is implemented, what changes to inequitable student achievement outcomes do you anticipate?</li> </ul> </li> <li>• How is plan progress managed and monitored? Who, how, when/how often? <ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>○ How is progress shared? With whom?</li> <li>○ What happens when data reveals that progress is not being made?</li> </ul> </li> </ul>
<p><i>Practice 3</i></p>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• How does the board learn about district progress?</li> <li>• How and when does the district communicate with families and community stakeholders? About what (e.g., planning, plan progress, student outcomes, equity, etc.)? <ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>○ How does the district ensure this information is accessible to all families and stakeholders? (i.e. available in native languages)</li> </ul> </li> <li>• How does the district solicit input and feedback from families and community stakeholders (e.g., annual surveys)? <ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>○ Are there opportunities for two-way, reciprocal communications?</li> </ul> </li> </ul>
<p><b>Closing Questions</b></p>	
<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• What is one recommendation for the district for the short-term? For the long-term?</li> <li>• Is there anything else we should know as we close and speak to other stakeholder groups? Is there anything else we should have asked?</li> </ul>	

## Principals

### Introductory Questions

- How would you summarize the strengths of your school/district?
- What are some areas for improvement?

### Essential Practice(s)

<p><i>Practice 2</i></p>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• How does central office respond to the needs of schools? <ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>○ What central office services are working to support schools? What central office services are barriers to schools getting what they need/focusing on the work?</li> </ul> </li> <li>• How do schools/principals know how to get what they need from central office?</li> </ul>
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<p><i>Practice 4</i></p>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• How does the district support schools with using high-quality curricular resources and assessments? <ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>○ How are high-quality curricular resources and assessments selected? Can schools choose/create their own curricular resources and assessments?</li> <li>○ What happens if schools don't implement them or struggle to implement them?</li> </ul> </li> <li>• How does the district report and utilize student assessment data? What are district expectations/protocols for analyzing student assessment data? <ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>○ Is data disaggregated by student group? How is it disaggregated?</li> <li>○ Who has access to data?</li> <li>○ What are the strengths and weaknesses of the district's system for reporting data?</li> </ul> </li> </ul>
<p><i>Practice 5</i></p>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• What is the instructional vision/focus of the district? What are the current district-wide instructional priorities?</li> <li>• How does the district support schools to effectively implement evidence-based instructional strategies and programs? Are there specific evidenced-based instructional strategies and programs that all schools should be using? If so, how are these identified?</li> <li>• What district supports or resources exist to support school staff in ensuring all students with special education and language development needs have access to rigorous, standards-aligned instruction? <ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>○ Are the district's procedures and supports meeting the needs of English language learners or students with disabilities/exceptionalities? How do you know?</li> </ul> </li> </ul>
<p><i>Practice 6</i></p>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• How does the district define instructional leadership? Who are the district's instructional leaders?</li> <li>• How does the district instill a commitment to continuous improvement of instruction? <ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>○ How are principals held accountable for student achievement?</li> </ul> </li> <li>• How does the district support principals with school-based planning? How do schools measure and monitor their progress? <ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>○ What indicators do they look at?</li> <li>○ What data or processes are used to identify root causes of low performance?</li> <li>○ How are principals held accountable for implementing their plan?</li> </ul> </li> <li>• What does principal support and management look like in this district? <ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>○ How does communication flow between principals, supervisors, and central office regarding school needs?</li> <li>○ Are these relationships positive and supportive?</li> </ul> </li> <li>• How does the district develop the instructional leadership capacity of principals?</li> <li>• How does the district support principals to develop teachers' capacity (e.g., through PD, feedback, coaching, PLCs, etc.)?</li> <li>• How does the district build school-level capacity to use data to inform instruction? <ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>○ What are the district expectations for teachers to use data to inform instruction?</li> <li>○ How is timely access to data to schools ensured?</li> <li>○ How is time for this built into school/teacher schedules?</li> <li>○ What data analysis guidance, protocols, and schedules does the district provide?</li> <li>○ Do school staff have the capacity to make effective decisions based on the results of their data analysis? What is working? Are there gaps?</li> </ul> </li> </ul>

<p><i>Practice 7</i></p>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• How do you track whether students are on track to graduate? What opportunities are available for remediation? For acceleration/enrichment?</li> <li>• How does the district prioritize the success of all students? <ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>○ What subgroup inequities/disproportionalities currently exist in the district? What contributes to these?</li> <li>○ How does the district address any inequities/disproportionalities?</li> <li>○ How do district policies and practices acknowledge that some groups of students have less access to equitable educational opportunities? Can you provide an example of a specific policy or practice in place?</li> </ul> </li> <li>• How are supports and resources differentiated or prioritized for schools or students based on identified needs? (e.g. staffing allocations, hiring practices, wraparound services for students and families, partnerships for additional or specialized counseling, social work, health services, etc.)</li> <li>• How does the district support schools to promote a positive school culture for all students and families?</li> <li>• How is the district supporting schools in engaging family and community members?</li> </ul>
<p><i>Practice 10</i></p>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• How does the district help build the leadership capacity if its principals? What opportunities do principals have for professional learning, coaching, networking, etc.?</li> <li>• Are there formal leadership pathways for teachers? For leaders? For central office staff? <ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>○ How are individuals identified, selected, and progressed through these pathways?</li> </ul> </li> <li>• How does the district support the professional learning of all staff (e.g., district or partner provided PD, coaching, PLC support, etc.)? <ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>○ What additional support is provided to new teachers and staff?</li> </ul> </li> <li>• How is district PD differentiated to meet staff needs? How useful is district-PD? What is the focus/topics of district-provided PD? Why and how was this determined?</li> </ul>

### Closing Questions

- What is one recommendation for the district for the short-term? For the long-term?
- Is there anything else we should know as we close and speak to other stakeholder groups? Is there anything else we should have asked?

## Families

### Introductory Questions

- How would you summarize the strengths of your school/district?
- What are some areas for improvement?

### Essential Practice(s)

<p><i>Practice 3</i></p>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• How does the district communicate with families? About what? <ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>○ Is the communication consistent, easy to understand, available in multiple platforms?</li> <li>○ How do you learn about what is happening in the district?</li> </ul> </li> <li>• What is your understanding of the district’s vision and main priorities now?</li> <li>• In what ways are you able to give feedback to your child’s school and to the district? <ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>○ Do you feel like you have a say in district decision-making?</li> </ul> </li> <li>• How does the district prioritize the success of all students in different groups (e.g., racial/ethnic, socio-economic, ability, etc.)? How does the district hold high expectation for all students?</li> </ul>
<p><i>Practice 5</i></p>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• How would you characterize the quality of education at your child’s school and/or across the district?</li> <li>• To what extent does the district ensure all students are college, career, and community ready?</li> </ul>
<p><i>Practice 7</i></p>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• Does the district communicate ways for families and students to get the support services they need? Do you know how to access the supports and resources your child needs?</li> <li>• What kind of support services (e.g. counseling, guidance, social work, health services, etc.) does the district provide? <ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>○ What supports or resources does the district provide to support student’s positive behavior, attendance and academic needs, mental health, health and wellness needs?</li> </ul> </li> <li>• How do families know if their child is doing well in school and/or on track to graduate? <ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>○ What opportunities are available for remediation? For acceleration/enrichment?</li> </ul> </li> <li>• Do you feel safe and welcome at your child’s school and in district offices?</li> <li>• Do you feel like your child’s school supports you in being an active participant in your child’s education? Why or why not?</li> </ul>
<p><i>Practice 8</i></p>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• Does the district have partnerships with businesses, employers, community organizations or other agencies they can refer you to if you are in need of support services? <ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>○ If so, which of these partnerships are most successful? What makes them successful?</li> <li>○ Which partnerships are less successful? Why?</li> </ul> </li> <li>• Are there partnerships you would recommend the district seek out in order to better support students and families?</li> </ul>

### Closing Questions

- What is one recommendation for the district for the short-term? For the long-term?
- Is there anything else we should know as we close and speak to other stakeholder groups? Is there anything else we should have asked?

## Students

### Introductory Questions

- How would you summarize the strengths of your school/district?
- What are some areas for improvement?



## Essential Practice(s)

<i>Practice 1</i>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"><li>• How does your school or district hold high expectations for all students?</li><li>• Do you believe your teachers believe you can succeed? How do you know?</li><li>• How does your school or district help students become college, career, and community ready? Does your school or district provide opportunities for advanced learning, college credit, technical education, internships, etc.?</li></ul>
<i>Practice 3</i>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"><li>• How does your district communicate with students and families? About what?</li><li>• How do you learn about what your district is doing or how well your district is doing?</li><li>• How does your school communicate with students and families? About what?</li></ul>
<i>Practice 5</i>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"><li>• Is your coursework challenging? Do you feel challenged in school? How do your teachers engage students in learning?</li><li>• Do you think what you learn in school is relevant for college, career, and community success? Why or why not?</li><li>• How do you think the district could better support schools?</li></ul>
<i>Practice 7</i>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"><li>• Do you feel safe at school and in your district? Why or why not?</li><li>• Does the district provide supports to help students be ready to learn (e.g., academic, attendance, behavior, mental health, health and wellness, etc.)? How would a student access these supports if they need them?</li><li>• How do you learn if you are on-track to graduate? What happens if you are off-track?</li></ul>

## Closing Questions

- What is one recommendation for the district to improve learning for all students?
- Is there anything else we should know?