GUIDANCE FOR

LEA/District
Engagement
in School Improvement

Every school. Every step.
Every student succeeds.

Developed by
Statewide Team for School Improvement
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Contents

Purpose of this Tool

LEA/district administrators are accountable to serve schools identified for support and improvement. This accountability is actionable through both indirect and direct involvement in school continuous improvement. The Pennsylvania's Essential Practices for Districts draw on research to outline conditions and practices that make it possible for school level teams to be more effective in leading school improvement.

The first portion of this document outlines actions that LEA/district administrators can take during both the development and the implementation of a school improvement plan. These actions enhance the opportunities for:

- coherence between school level plans and LEA/district comprehensive plans

- strategic and equitable resource allocation– including time, fiscal, and human capital resources

- differentiated professional learning based on evidence-based practices and school needs

The second portion of the document provides guidance for ways in which to LEA/district leaders' actions provide the climate for continuous improvement of all schools within the system. These strategies are articulated more specifically in the Pennsylvania's Essential Practices for Districts.

Last, resources are provided. In addition, consultation with the Statewide Team for School Improvement can be scheduled by emailing PDECSI@iu13.org.

Theory of Action

The guidance provided in this document is grounded in the Theory of Action for School Improvement provided by The Pennsylvania Department of Education (PDE), which highlights the role of both the SEA and the LEA in supporting schools in continuous improvement. PDE is committed to supporting and monitoring the school improvement efforts of Local Education Agencies (LEAs), schools, and their communities.

A THEORY OF ACTION *for* School Improvement

The Pennsylvania Department of Education is committed to supporting and monitoring the school improvement efforts of **Local Education Agencies (LEAs)***, schools, and their communities. With a shared vision for the future of education in PA, we will work together to create:

GOAL: *LEAs that are accountable and empowered to serve schools identified for support and improvement*

GOAL: *Schools and communities that are accountable and empowered to provide effective, engaging instruction within a supportive culture*

GOAL: *Engaged, healthy, safe students who are* **college • career • community ready**

If Pennsylvania:

- *Meaningfully engages stakeholders in the design, implementation, and monitoring of supports for continuous improvement;*
- *Implements a cycle of improvement that is focused on results;*
- *Fosters a culture of evidence-based policies and practices; and*
- *Deploys regional systems of differentiated resources, supports and interventions responsive to LEAs' and schools' highest-priority needs,*

and LEAs:

- *Establish effective, standards-aligned instructional programs;*
- *Support schools and their communities in removing barriers to learning;*
- *Customize support systems to meet school-level needs and context;*
- *Implement data-informed human capital systems; and*
- *Allocate resources based on the needs of individual schools and their communities,*

then schools and their communities can:

- *Support effective instructional practices in all classrooms;*
- *Foster collective responsibility for the academic, social, emotional and behavioral outcomes of all students;*
- *Cultivate a safe, positive and supportive climate that is conducive to learning; and*
- *Provide high-quality professional learning opportunities for all administrators, teachers and support staff.*

LEA/District Engagement with School Level Continuous Improvement

The cycle of continuous improvement includes multiple phases in which the LEA/district administrators can engage with school continuous improvement efforts.

Engagement at each phase of the cycle provides opportunities to:

- *Develop alignment* between school and LEA/district visions, priorities, and goals.

- *Engage in data review and root cause analysis* to understand the driving factors impacting the school's challenges.

- *Provide guidance i*n selection and implementation of evidence-based strategies. This guidance ensures LEA/district financial, human capital, and scheduling support.

- *Identify action steps* for which LEA/district administrators can take responsibility and or provide guidance.

- *Join the monitoring routines* in order to:
  - understand successes and challenges of plan implementation;
  - remain aware of goal attainment;
  - celebrate successes and clarify barriers to success;
  - adjust support to schools; and
  - adjust LEA/district systems as needed.
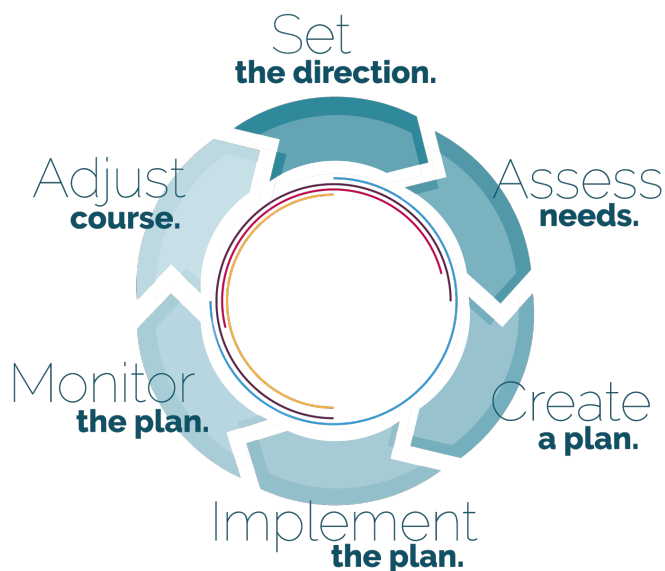
District & School Connections

Work at the district and school levels does not happen in a vacuum. Instead, systems and structures at the district level impact the success of school level plans. The Pennsylvania's Essential Practices for Districts draw on research to outline conditions and practices that make it possible for school level teams to be more effective in leading school improvement.

The following sections include references to Pennsylvania Essential Practices for Districts in parenthesis after each suggestion for school level support *(D-EP #)*.

Set the Direction

During the "Set the Direction" phase, LEA/district administrators can be engaged by:

✓ Sharing the district vision and clarifying the expectation for the level of alignment between district and school visions. *(D-EP 1)*

✓ Articulating LEA/district goals as well as goals for schools and student groups. *(D-EP 1)*

✓ Guiding school committees to develop inclusive and equitable vision statements. *(D-EP 1)*

> **EXAMPLE:** A district leader met with all school leaders in January to share the district level areas of focus for the following school year. This allowed school leaders to align their direction to the district direction.

Assess Needs

During the "Assess Needs" phase, LEA/district administrators can be engaged by:

✓ Partnering with school committees as needed to gather data that is aggregated and disaggregated in a variety of ways, including student group, course, grade-level, content area. *(D-EP7)*

✓ Supporting the organization of survey distribution to families, students, and staff. Upon completion of surveys, support the organization, visualization, and analysis of survey data. *(D-EP7, D-EP8)*

✓ Providing support in the facilitation of student and staff focus groups. Upon completion of surveys, support the organization, visualization, and analysis of focus group data. *(D-EP7, D-EP8)*

✓ Joining school committee root cause analysis conversations to model and encourage ownership of results and actions as teams identify problems of practice that may have contributed to challenges identified during data analysis. *(D-EP1, D-EP6)*

> **EXAMPLE:** A district administrator served as the point person for sharing links to parent and educator surveys. A consistent message regarding surveys was sent to all parents across the district.

Create a Plan

During the "Create a Plan" phase, LEA/district administrators can be engaged by:

- ✓ Partnering with school committee members in determining the evidence-based strategies to be implemented at the school level. *(D-EP4, D-EP5)*

- ✓ Reviewing the selected evidence-based strategies to ensure alignment with LEA/district vision and state standards. *(D-EP4, D-EP5)*

- ✓ Collaborating with appropriate LEA/district administrators to ensure support for selected evidence-based strategies (financial, professional staff, time for professional development, etc.). Determine the level of fit of the selected evidence-based strategy in the context of the school and district programming. Support the school leader in determining current programs or strategies to be discontinued in order for the selected strategy to be implemented with fidelity. *(D-EP4, D-EP5)*

- ✓ Providing guidance to school leaders in developing annual and quarterly goals that are SMARTIE (specific, measurable, attainable, relevant, timely, inclusive, and equitable). Research on the selected evidence-based strategy should be used to set attainable and relevant goals. Assess the relationship between LEA/district and school growth and achievement goals. *(D-EP1, D-EP2)*

- ✓ Articulating areas where LEA/district leaders will take responsibility and offer support as the school team develops action steps. (*D-EP2)*

EXAMPLES:
- A district curriculum coordinator joined the school committee as they reviewed and selected an evidence-based strategy to guide math instruction. This ensured district support for the strategy.
- A district administrator joined the school committee as they wrote the steps to expand their PBIS system. This ensured that the steps were aligned to the strategy and could be supported by the district.

Implement the Plan

During the "Implement the Plan" phase of school continuous improvement, LEA/district administrators can be engaged by:

✓ Supporting schools with implementing the selected evidence-based strategies and programs. *(D-EP4)*

✓ Taking responsibility for steps of the action plan for which they were assigned. *(D-EP4)*

✓ Identifying and strengthening partnerships between schools, local businesses, and community organizations to support the implementation of school plans and reach the desired outcomes. *(D-EP8)*

EXAMPLE: A superintendent met with members of the statewide team, including the School Improvement Facilitator, and school leaders to clarify the steps that were going to be taken to support the school team in understanding their data and using the data for decision-making.

Monitor & Adjust Plans

During the "Monitor" and "Adjust Plans" phases of school continuous improvement, LEA/district administrators can be engaged by:

✓ Articulating and implementing a district-wide monitoring process to evaluate each schools' implementation status. *(D- EP4)*

✓ Collaborating with school leaders to monitor the implementation of plans and progress toward defined goals. *(D- EP6)*

✓ Partnering with school leaders to organize and analyze data with school teams to identify areas of success and areas where adjustments or supports are warranted. Provide protocols to guide conversations and adjustment decisions. *(D-EP6)*

✓ Providing guidance, thought-partnership, and resources to school leaders and leadership teams to support implementation, and monitoring of school plans. *(D-EP6)*

EXAMPLES:

• A district representative supported the school's data team with district-wide data collection and analysis. This helped the school to identify school specific trends and also highlighted district-wide challenges.

• District leaders attended and were actively engaged in problem solving with the school leader and School Improvement Facilitator during the quarterly routines.

LEA/District Level Actions that Support Schools in Continuous Improvement

Systems and structures developed at the LEA/district level have an impact on the level of engagement, safety, and readiness of students for college, career, and the community. LEA/district leaders are accountable to serve schools identified for support and improvement. LEA/district leader actions listed below will serve to support schools in providing effective, engaging instruction within a supportive culture. These actions are organized into five conditions, each comprised of evidence-based practices. Rubrics and indicators of each practice can be found in the Essential Practices for Districts Toolkit (Appendices A, B, and C).

Empowering Leadership

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.

✓ Foster a vision and culture of high expectations for success for all stakeholders

✓ Establish and maintain a focused system for continuous improvement and ensure organizational coherence

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

EXAMPLE: District leaders held a series of community forums/town halls to both share information about school planning and to gather feedback regarding priorities and opportunities.

Focusing on Continuous Improvement of Instruction

District leadership facilitates 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.

✓ Ensure effective, standards-aligned curriculum and assessment

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

✓ Build the capacity of central office and school building administrators as instructional leaders to effectively monitor, supervise, and support high-quality teaching and learning.

EXAMPLES:

- Principal supervisor includes "resource allocation" during individual school leader support conversations to ensure resources are aligned to student needs.
- There is a coordinated meeting with representation from business, human capital, and curriculum departments to provide targeted support to schools in an equitable manner. The meeting started with a review of demographic, perception, and student learning data

Providing Student-Centered Supports

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.

✓ Coordinate and monitor supports aligned with students' and families' needs.

✓ Partner with local businesses, employers, community organizations, and other agencies to meet the needs of the district.

EXAMPLE: A district team engages in a data dialogue each quarter to analyze trends across the district and at specific schools. The protocol concludes with clear next steps for resource allocation, professional learning, and outreach plans.

Implementing 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.

- ✓ Recruit and retain fully credentialed, experienced and high-quality teachers.
- ✓ 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.

EXAMPLE: Central office staff examined the step-by-step processes for advertising teacher job openings and for selecting teachers. Using ongoing input from school leaders and other stakeholders, the LEA staff revised job posts to reflect the skills and knowledge most needed in a CSI school *and* to show the particular advantages of working there (e.g., colleagues, students, job perks). The process aimed to attract candidates who are the best fit for the school's specific needs.

Allocating Resources Strategically and Equitability

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.

- ✓ Allocate resources, including money, staff, professional learning, materials, and support to schools based on the analysis of a variety of data.
- ✓ Coordinate fiscal resources from local, state, and federal programs to achieve the district's goals and priorities.

EXAMPLE: District leaders held a series of community forums/town halls to both share information about school planning and to gather feedback regarding priorities and opportunities.

Resources to Enhance LEA/District Engagement Efforts

- Pennsylvania System for LEA/School Improvement

- Essential Practices for Districts Toolkit

- Theory of Action for School Improvement

- Pennsylvania Continuous Improvement Learning Modules are available to develop foundational knowledge and tools for each phase of the cycle of continuous improvement. These modules include, but are not limited to:
  - **Set the Direction:**
    - » The Continuous Improvement Process in PA
    - » Stakeholder Engagement
    - » Establishing a Clear Direction
  - **Assess Needs:**
    - » The PA Essential Practices
    - » Using the PA Essential Practices
    - » Conducting a Needs Assessment
    - » School Priorities for Improvement
    - » Root Cause Analysis
  - **Create a Plan:**
    - » Creating the Plan Based on the Needs Assessment and the Root Cause Analysis
    - » High-Quality Goal Writing
    - » Evidence-Based Strategies
    - » Create an Action Plan
    - » Establishing Implementation Teams to Actualize the Plan
  - **Implement the Plan:**
    - » Preparing for Implementation
    - » Taking Action
   - » Communicating Progress
  - **Monitor the Plan:**
    - » The importance of plan monitoring
    - » Monitoring routines: Biweekly meetings, monthly meetings, quarterly meetings
    - » Reporting Progress to Stakeholders- Implementation and Performance Data
  - **Adjust Course:**
    - » School Improvement is Continuous Improvement
    - » Targeted and Timely Adjustments
    - » Beyond the Plan, Adjusting Course

Additional resources:

- Vision for Learning: Includes a link to a toolkit for developing and/or refining vision and mission statements

- Establishing a Steering Committee

- Meaningful Local Engagement Under ESSA

- Creating Strategic Planning Teams

- Three Steps to Selecting Your Superhero Strategic Planning Team

- Set: Complete a Needs Assessment

- Preparing for the Essential Practices Self-Assessment: Includes a list of data and sources of evidence to gather

- Essential Practices for Schools and Communities Toolkit-2022: The toolkit includes conditions and essential practices for schools and their communities; rubrics, guiding questions, sources of evidence recommendations per essential practice; and indicators of operational, or "look fors".

- Root Cause Analysis

- Priority Statements

- Goal Statements and Targets

- Selecting Evidence-Based Strategies

- Pennsylvania Evidence Resource Center
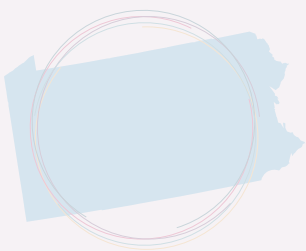
For more information about Continuous Improvement in Pennsylvania,
contact the Statewide Team for School Improvement at **pdecsi@iu13.org**.