



Pennsylvania's Guide to Continuous Improvement

*Every school. Every step.
Every student succeeds.*

Last revised 01/2025.



Pennsylvania
Department of Education



education.pa.gov



Introduction

This Guide to Continuous Improvement serves as a resource for school and LEA/district leaders as part of the Pennsylvania System for Continuous Improvement.

The intention of the guide is to provide leaders with a resource that:

- can be readily accessible by print or electronically
- assist in understanding and knowing how to support school improvement efforts
- can provide documents, forms, and protocols to assist in the process of continuous improvement

A strong understanding of continuous improvement is foundational to best practices in classrooms. One of the most powerful ways that schools can support student success is by creating and following a school improvement plan.

Continuous improvement calls for specific, intentional changes in systems, instruction, curriculum which can, in turn, lead to improved teacher effectiveness and student success. Without such a plan, schools will most likely continue to make unorganized attempts to improve with limited or no measurable success.

The implementation of a well-thought-out school improvement plan, guided by a knowledgeable principal, is essential for student achievement.

Alphabet Soup

Acronyms of PA Continuous Improvement

A-TSI - Additional Targeted Support and Improvement

BoY – Beginning of Year

CSI – Comprehensive Support and Improvement

EBS – Evidence Based Strategies

EP – Essential Practices

ERC – Evidence Resource Center

EoY – End of Year

FRPI – Future Ready PA Index

FSA – Facilitated Self-Assessment (Needs Assessment)

IU – Intermediate Unit

NIC – Networked Improvement Community

PDE – Pennsylvania Department of Education

PL – Professional Learning

PLC – Professional Learning Community

PM – Performance Management

RCA – Root Cause Analysis

RIT – Regional Improvement Team

SCSC – School Community Steering Committee

SEA – State Education Agency

SI – School Improvement

SIF – School Improvement Facilitator

SME – Subject Matter Expert

SOW – Statement of Work, Scope of Work

SWT – Statewide Team (for CSI)

TSI – Targeted Support and Improvement

Organization of this Guide

Section A – Introduction to PA School Improvement	4
Overview of the PA Continuous Improvement Process	
The CSI Designation	
Section B – READY: Set the Direction	8
Preparing for School Improvement Planning	
• Accessing the Future Ready Planning Portal	
• Establishing Teams	
• Steering Committee	
Stakeholder Engagement	
Establishing a Clear Direction	
Section C – SET: Assess Needs	14
The PA Essential Practices	
Conducting a Needs Assessment	
Root Cause Analysis	
Priority Statements	
Section D – GO: Create a Plan.....	20
Benchmarks that reflect effective implementation	
High Quality Goal Writing	
Selecting Evidence-Based Strategies	
Action Planning for Success	
Professional Development	
Section E – GO: Implementing the Plan	25
Preparing for Implementation	
Technical Assistance Plans	
Section F – GO: Monitor the Plan.....	29
Monitoring Structures and Tools	
Taking Action	
Monitoring Routines <i>Biweekly, Monthly, and Quarterly meetings</i>	
Communicating Progress to Stakeholders <i>Implementation and performance data</i>	
Section G – GO: Adjust Course.....	37
Adjusting the Plan Using Implementation Data	
Adjusting the Plan Using Impact Data	
Beyond the Plan <i>Adjusting course to build on team progress, building internal capacity</i>	

SECTION A

Introduction to PA School Improvement

Overview of the PA Continuous Improvement Process

When viewed as an organizational strategy, rather than an exercise in compliance, the continuous improvement cycle gives schools a framework through which focused and intentional action can take place.

The [Every Student Succeeds Act \(ESSA\)](#) provides each state with enhanced flexibility to designate and serve schools in need of support.

The [process of identifying schools for support](#)—termed “Annual Meaningful Differentiation” by the federal statute—results in two federally-prescribed designations, made at least every three years beginning December 2018:

- **Comprehensive Support and Improvement (CSI):** Schools facing the most significant challenges in academic achievement, student growth, and other areas.
- **Additional Targeted Support and Improvement (A-TSI):** Schools in which performance by one or more student groups is at or below the level of the CSI schools.
- **Targeted Support and Improvement (TSI) :** Any school in which one or more student groups performs below the CSI thresholds for academic proficiency, academic growth, and either:
 - 1) one or both substantially weighted indicators (graduation rate and progress in achieving English language proficiency); or
 - 2) both school quality/student success indicators (chronic absenteeism and career readiness), will be identified for TSI.

Additionally, any school in which the combined 4- and 5-year adjusted cohort graduation rate for one or more student groups is 67 percent or below will be identified for TSI.

Pennsylvania's System for LEA and School Improvement

https://www.iu13.org/wp-content/uploads/2022/04/PAs-System-for-LEA-and-School-Improvement_Nov-2021.pdf

PENNSYLVANIA'S System for LEA and School Improvement

Improvement Teams

Building LEA and school capacity and empowering continuous improvement of leadership, teaching, and learning with:

- **Improvement Facilitators** for on-site support in the design and implementation of an evidence-based continuous improvement process
- **Content Support** for the creation and implementation of evidence-based improvement plans, offering experience in: curriculum, instruction, and assessment; early learning; human capital strategies; data analysis; student support services; family and community engagement; and organizational effectiveness

School Improvement Dashboard

Monitoring implementation and outcomes of state, LEA, and school improvement efforts.

Strategic Human Capital

Supporting LEA work to recruit, develop and retain effective educators – with tools, collaborative meetings, and one-on-one guidance.

Research-Practice Partnerships

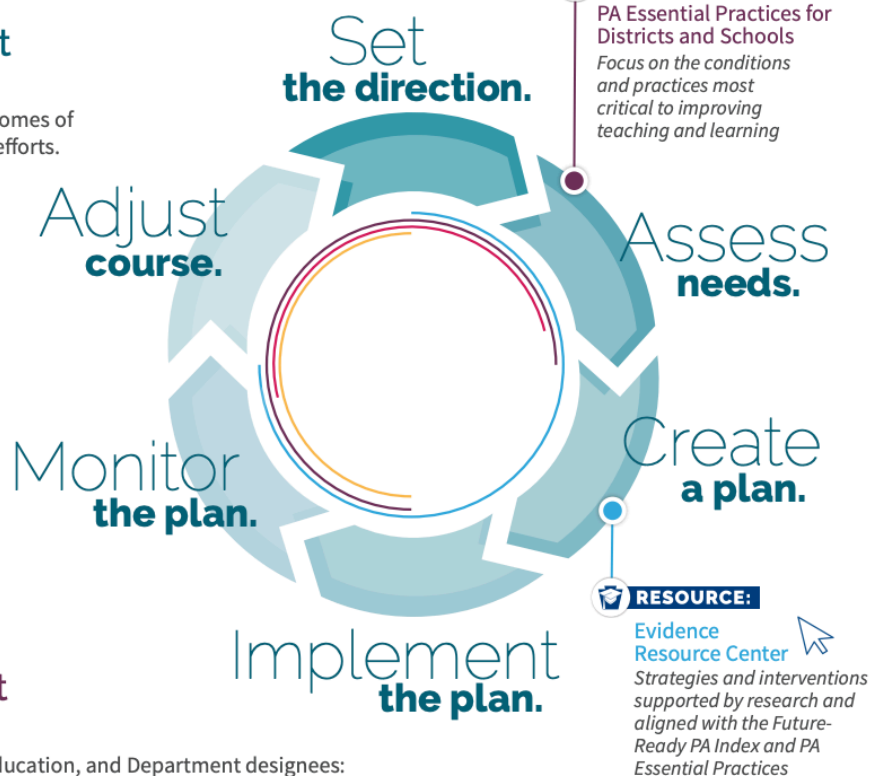
Teams from the education and research communities identifying key challenges at the ground level, developing research-based interventions, and sharing results.

School Improvement Advisory Council

Practitioners, institutions of higher education, and Department designees:

- Providing feedback on the:
 - Design of school improvement resources, systems and supports to ensure alignment with LEA and school needs
 - Systems for monitoring and evaluating accessibility, quality, equity, and impact of the components of the state system for LEA and school improvement;
- Problem-solving viable solutions for scaling practices that are yielding results and adjusting practices where implementation or outcomes are less than desirable; and
- Supporting engagement and buy-in from LEAs and schools.

Last revised 08/2021.



CSI Designation

Characteristics of Schools in Continuous School Improvement (CSI)



ESSA Annual Meaningful Differentiation

SUPPORT DESIGNATION	BASED ON...	DESIGNATION CYCLE
Comprehensive Support and Improvement (CSI)	School-wide performance <ul style="list-style-type: none"> The lowest-performing five percent of all schools receiving Title I funds in the State Any high school – Title I or not – with a combined 4- and 5-year adjusted cohort graduation rate of 67 percent or less 	Every three years, beginning Fall 2018

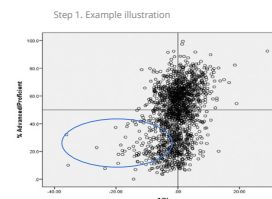
Accountability Indicators in PA

- Indicators required by the Every Student Succeeds Act (ESSA):
 - Achievement – Percent Proficient
 - Academic Progress – Growth
 - Graduation Rate – Four- and five-year cohort rates
 - English Learner proficiency
- Additional indicators selected by PA:
 - Career standards
 - Regular attendance

Designation for CSI – Step 1

- Designation as Comprehensive Support and Improvement (CSI) School:

Step 1: Preliminary eligibility based on low academic achievement and low growth



Designation for CSI – Step 2

Evaluation of:

- Substantially Weighted Indicators**
 - High school graduation rate
 - Progress in moving English Learners to proficiency
- School Quality/Student Success Indicators**
 - Regular attendance
 - Career standards
- Schools that fell below the established threshold of school performance on either of the following were designation for CSI:**
 - One or both substantially weighted indicators; or
 - Both school quality/student success indicators.

Designation for CSI – Step 2

School Example	Substantially Weighted Indicators		School Quality and Success Indicators		Result
Grades served; school characteristics	ELP Progress	Graduation Rate	Regular Attendance	Career Standards	
K-5; EL meets N-size		N.A.; not a high school			Not CSI
1-6; EL no on N-size	N.A.	N.A.			CSI
6-8; EL meets N-size		N.A.; not a high school			CSI
6-9; EL no on N-size	N.A.	N.A.			Not CSI
9-12; EL meets N-size					CSI
10-12; EL no on N-size	N.A.				Not CSI

Designation for CSI – Step 3

- **Step 3:** Any additional high schools with graduation rate at or below 67 percent
 - Includes all high schools, not just Title I

Q:

What will be expected of LEAs and schools designated for CSI?



Federal Requirements – CSI

In partnership with stakeholders, develop and implement an improvement plan that:

- ☐ Is informed by all indicators in the state accountability system;
- ☐ Includes evidence-based interventions;
- ☐ Is based on a school-level needs assessment;
- ☐ Identifies resource inequities to be addressed through implementation of the plan;
- ☐ Is approved by the school, LEA and SEA; and
- ☐ Is monitored and periodically reviewed by the SEA.

Role of the LEA in School Improvement

- ☐ Establish a culture that supports continuous improvement.
- ☐ Adopt a clear, transparent focus on student achievement as the bottom line.
- ☐ Prioritize instructional support and coherence.
- ☐ Allocate resources and supports equitably, as informed by school needs.
- ☐ Invest in leader and teacher development.
- ☐ Invest in collection, analysis, and use of data to identify effective and ineffective practices.
- ☐ Effectively engage and communicate, building a strong constituency for reform.

Title I Funding for School Improvement

- All CSI schools will receive a formula-driven grant during SY 2018-19.
 - Based on the Title I, Part A formula
 - Additional funds for schools with a reportable English Learner student group
- Every CSI school will receive a second year of formula-driven funding, provided schools make timely and thorough reports to PDE.

SECTION B

READY: Set the Direction

1. Preparing for School Improvement Planning

Effective planning begins when we set the stage for collaborative work. Taking time to organize helps to ensure that this process is meaningful, inclusive, and grounded in equity.

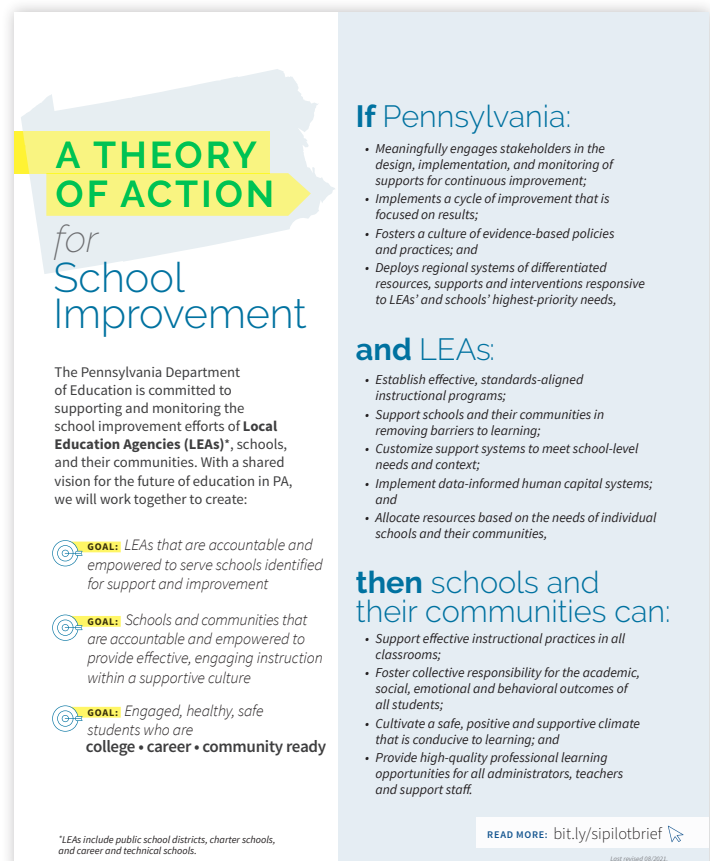
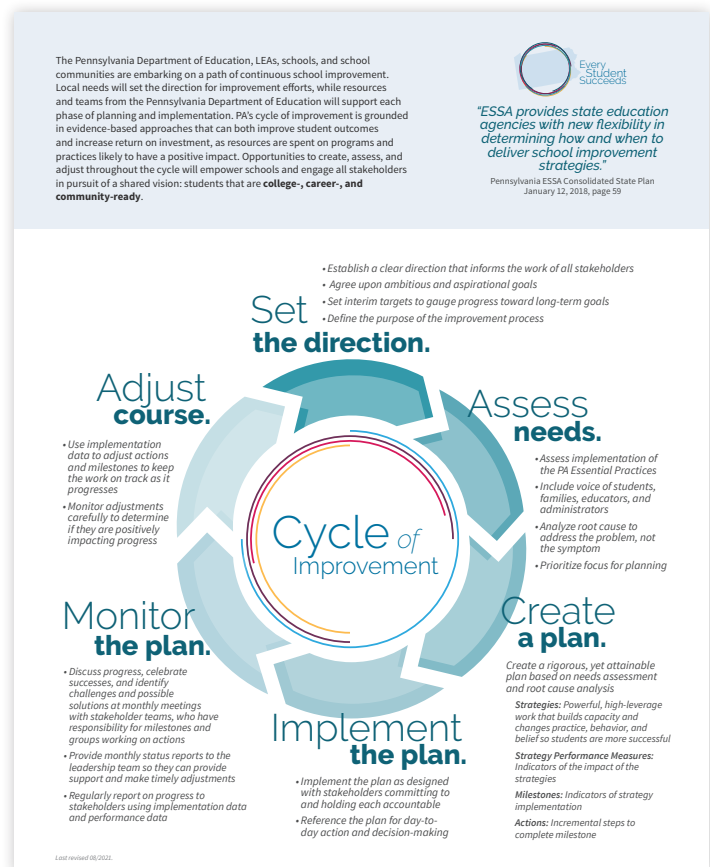
The first step in establishing structures is to adopt an improvement process or a plan for change. This is an opportunity for the school and the LEA to define the purpose of the improvement process.

What does the LEA/school hope to achieve in this process?

What are the points of pride for the school/LEA?

Where has the school/LEA experienced challenges?

In Pennsylvania, we have adopted the Cycle of Improvement grounded in our Theory of Action for School Improvement. It is important for the school team to have a shared understanding of both to ensure a common language and set the tone for the work to begin together as a partnership.



A. Accessing the Future Ready Comprehensive Planning Portal

The Future Ready Comprehensive Planning Portal was created to provide a consistent planning framework and collection tool for all Pennsylvania local education agencies (school districts, charter schools, area vocational schools/ career and technical centers, Intermediate Units) and schools. This new model provides flexibility in the planning process based on individual community needs, is grounded in an outcomes-based approach focused on student achievement and encourages schools and districts to more effectively and efficiently plan and lead innovative school improvement practices. The core concepts are based on a simplistic logic model, one that any local education agency or school can effectively use for developing cohesive long-term goals and action plans, monitoring yearly progress, and providing transparency in communication with school personnel, state officials, parents and community.

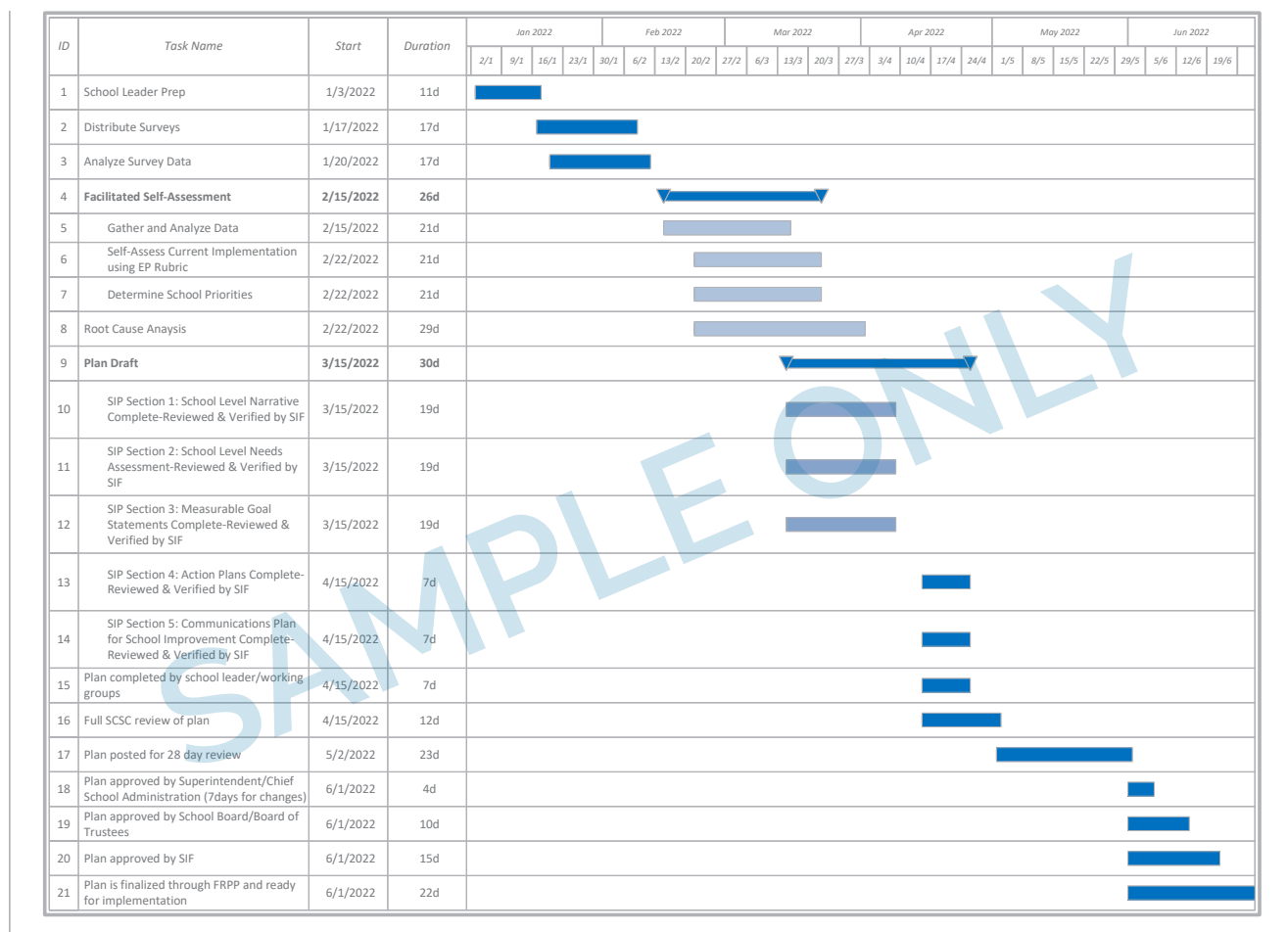
The first step to gaining access to the Future Ready Comprehensive Planning Portal is to ensure that you are a registered user on the PDE portal. If you are not a registered user, please reference this document: [Register a Username and Log In](#).

Your local education agency's Local Security Administrator can add/remove users in MyPDESuite. If you need help adding users to the new portal, please use the [step-by-step guide for Accessing the Future Ready Comprehensive Planning Portal](#).

If you do not know who your Administrators are, you can find this information by clicking on Find my Security Administrator on the main page in MyPDESuite.

Sample School Improvement Planning Timeline

<https://www.iu13.org/wp-content/uploads/2022/05/CSI-21-22-Sample-Planning-Timeline.pdf>



Reference Guide FOR CONTINUOUS

Plan Signature Requirements - Plan Signature Requirements

Who needs to approve the plan for it to be ready for plan submission in the FRCPP?

The following table provides an overview of who must sign each plan type. It is important to ensure that district policies and procedures are followed to include the review and approval of individuals not included in the provided table.

Plan Name	Signatures Required	Board Approval Required	Public Review Required
Comprehensive Plan	Chief School Administrator	Yes	28 day
Schoolwide Title I	Principal	No	No
School Plan (Non-designated)	N/A	No	No
CSI	Chief School Administrator, Principal, and School Improvement Facilitator (SIF)	Yes	Yes
Non-Title I A-TSI	Chief School Administrator and Principal	Yes	Yes
Title I A-TSI	Chief School Administrator, Principal, and School Improvement Facilitator (SIF)	Yes	Yes
Title I TSI	Chief School Administrator and Principal	No (temporarily not needed)	Yes
Non-Title I TSI	Chief School Administrator and Principal	No (temporarily not needed)	Yes
Special Ed Plans	Superintendent	Yes	Yes
CSAR	Chief Executive Officer	Yes	Yes

School Improvement Planning Rubric - School Improvement Planning Rubric

<https://www.iu13.org/wp-content/uploads/2024/04/School-Improvement-Plan-Quality-Review-Rubric-pdf.pdf>

Section of Portal	Section of Plan	Criteria to Meet	Meets All Criteria (Yes or No)	Changes needed in order to meet criteria	Meets All Criteria (Yes or No)	Changes needed in order to meet criteria
Ready	Profile and Plan Essentials	All information is accurate.				
Ready	Steering Committee	For schools with a CSI designation, the Every Student Succeeds Act (ESSA) requires the inclusion of: Chief School Administrator principal other school leaders staff members parents community partners students (if secondary level) The Statewide Team for School Improvement suggests that an LEA/district administrator is included in addition to the CSA, and that parents and community partners are not employees of the school or district.				
Ready	Vision for Learning	There is a coherent statement that articulates how the school will impact students' preparedness for college, career, and community. The school's commitment to and passion for continuous improvement is evident. The vision is clear enough to be understood by internal and external stakeholder groups.				

B. Establishing Teams

While it is extremely important that all members of the school community are knowledgeable about their roles and responsibilities in the work of continuous improvement, school leaders are encouraged to carefully consider who might be best suited to serve on their school's improvement team.

- For some schools, these might be the same individuals who serve on the school improvement steering committee.
- For other schools, the steering committee might be a larger group that is engaged throughout the process for feedback and input.
- The school improvement team might be made up of the implementation team leads and other key individuals that ensure the day-to-day work of continuous improvement occurs smoothly.
- Organizing for collaborative work is ongoing and not something that is done only at the beginning of the year.

C. Steering Committee

Establishing a committee inclusive of a diverse group of stakeholders is critical to the success of the school improvement plan process. The Every Student Succeeds Act (ESSA) requires that this committee include the principal/ chief school administrator and other school leaders, teachers, students (if a secondary school), parents/guardians and members of the community.

Criteria from the School Improvement Plan Review Rubric for School Improvement Committee (a.k.a., School Community Steering Committee):

The Steering Committee is comprised of a diverse group of community members who are involved and invested in LEAs, schools, programs, and outcomes for students (leadership, teachers, parents, students, community partners, LEA leadership or staff, governing board leadership or designee, elected officials advocacy organizations).

2. Stakeholder Engagement

ESSA requires each state, district, and school to consult with an array of stakeholders on issues ranging from how best to disburse federal funds to how to support schools that serve struggling or high-need students. The specific consultation requirements vary across the programs, but the focus on engagement across ESSA is consistent. This gives states and districts a chance to commit to engagement with all stakeholders in an ongoing and meaningful way.

Engaging stakeholders is not only required under the law, but is a strong best practice to effectively improve schools.

Making decisions on education policy in an inclusive and transparent way leads to better decisions and encourages stakeholders to contribute and become partners in achieving the goals in the state and local community.

Communities will support improvement strategies that they help to develop. Partnerships with outside stakeholders,

including parents, philanthropy, community-based organizations, and others will build local capacity to implement innovative and ambitious strategies for meeting the needs of all students.

Work with Your School and District Leaders to Ensure Each of the Questions Below are Answered:

Who will be the point person to manage the logistics for the planning process?

Who will facilitate team meetings and exercises?

Who will write the plan?

How will we consult with a broad range of stakeholders from our school community in the development of the plan?

Who needs to approve the plan for it to be finalized?

Engagement should begin with students; it is essential that local leaders know and understand the communities they serve, starting with the children they serve.

It is highly encouraged that schools make an extra effort to engage representatives from underrepresented and historically marginalized stakeholder groups. It is important to include voices representing students with unique needs, students in low-income families, students with disabilities, students of color, English learners, migrant students, military-connected students, students who are homeless, foster youth, and students with trauma histories.

Criteria from the School Improvement Plan Review Rubric for School Level Vision for Learning:

The plan includes a concise, coherent, and bold vision that specifically articulates a long-term vision and measure of success for students. The vision demonstrates compelling evidence of alignment to the most pressing school community needs and the school's commitment to and passion for continuous improvement. The vision easily translates to both internal and external stakeholder groups, especially students.

3. Establishing a Clear Direction

Establishing an agreed-upon vision for the school is the first step in plan development. The vision should embody the school community's best thinking about teaching and learning. A school needs to know where it wants to be in order to improve. The vision provides stakeholders with a common direction for growth, something that inspires them to continuously strive to better meet students' needs.

LEAs and/or schools may already have a vision statement that has been approved with the Comprehensive Plan. If so, build upon this established vision with a specific focus on a vision for student groups targeted for continuous improvement.

Steps to Complete a Vision Statement for Learning:

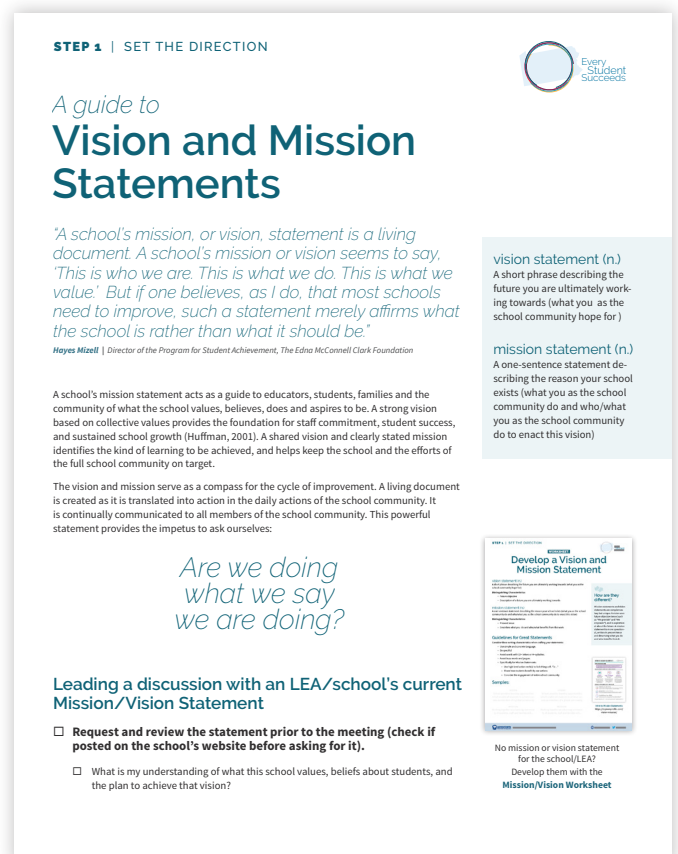
1. Facilitate a discussion about your school's vision for students with the continuous improvement team.
2. Determine whether the school's vision reflects current beliefs about teaching and learning and needs of students in the community you serve.
3. If necessary, revise the vision statement to reflect the committee's feedback.
4. Finalize your agreed upon vision statement.

Guiding Questions for Schools:

- What is the school's vision for teaching and learning?
- What will students know and be able to demonstrate upon graduation from your school?
- What values and beliefs are reflected in the vision statement?
- Does the vision statement align with the needs of the community we serve?
- How will we know if we achieved our vision?

Mission & Vision Toolkit

https://www.iu13.org/wp-content/uploads/2022/04/PDESI_MissionandVisionStatements.pdf



SECTION C

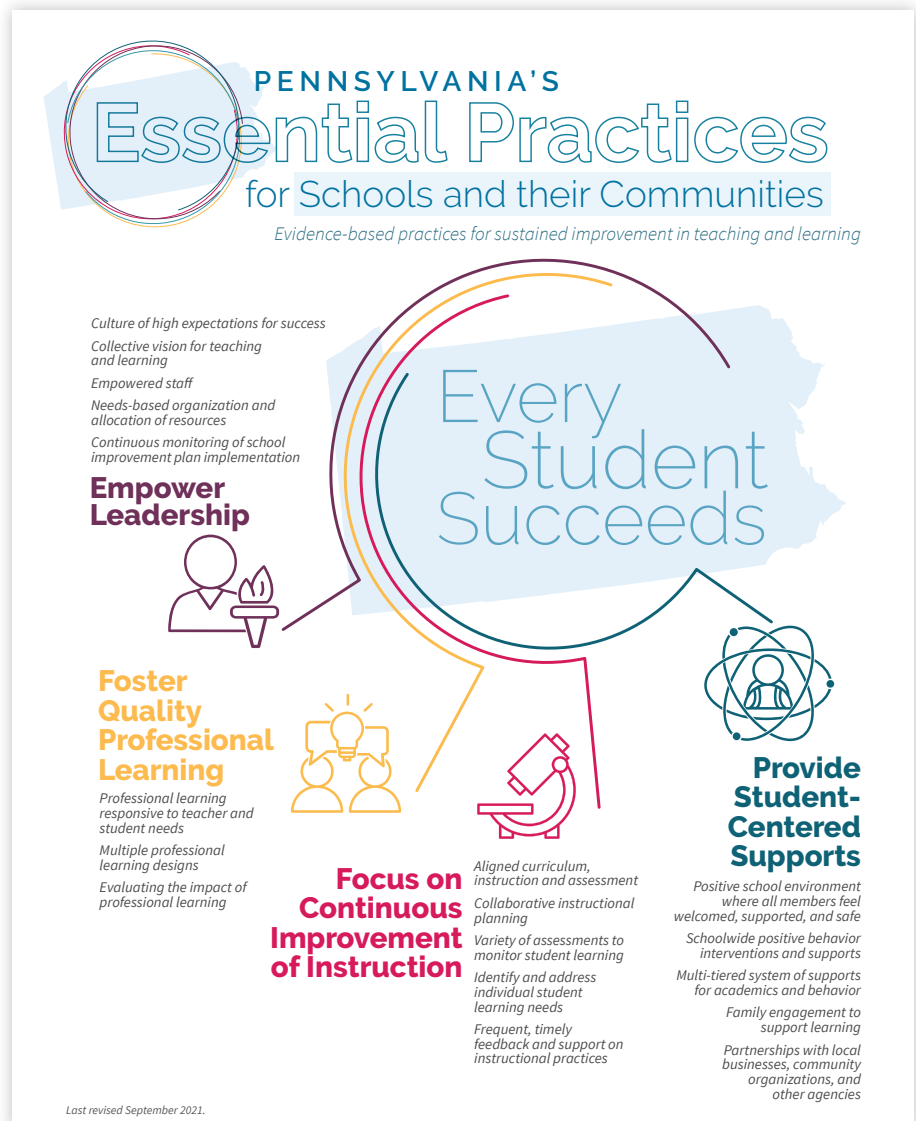
SET: Assess Needs

1. The PA Essential Practices

There is a substantive evidence base identifying explicit conditions and practices that are most critical for improved teaching and learning for all students. Pennsylvania's continuous improvement efforts provides a robust focus on essential conditions observed in schools that have shown significant and sustained gains in student achievement. These four conditions are focus on continuous improvement of instruction, empower leadership, provide student-centered support systems and foster quality professional learning. The PA Essential Practices for Schools and their Communities are divided into these four core conditions.

The purpose of the PA Essential Practices for Schools and their Communities is to provide formative feedback and inform continuous improvement efforts. The data gathered through the PA Essential Practices assessment process will help schools and local education agencies (LEAs) understand the current status of the implementation of evidence-based practices that foster sustained improvement in teaching and learning for all students and assist school communities in identifying priorities for improvement that will lead to improved teaching and learning for all students.

While the Pennsylvania Department of Education (PDE) highly encourages all schools to use the PA Essential Practices for Schools and their Communities, schools designated for Comprehensive Support and Improvement (CSI) and Title I schools designated for Additional Targeted Support and Improvement (A-TSI), and the districts that support and manage them, are required to use the PA Essential Practices for Schools as an integral part of a comprehensive needs assessment.



The Essential Practices for Schools and Communities

<https://www.iu13.org/wp-content/uploads/2022/04/Essential-Practices-for-Schools-and-Communities-Toolkit-2022.pdf>

The Essential Practices for Schools and Communities is a tool that allows schools to better understand the strengths and areas of growth within the Essential Practices.

The Essential Practices for Schools and Communities Rubric

https://www.iu13.org/wp-content/uploads/2022/04/Essential-Practices-for-Schools_-Rubric_Nov-2021.pdf

RUBRIC:

Pennsylvania Essential Practices for Schools

CONDITION: Focus on Continuous Improvement of Instruction

Effective instructional practice, including strong standards-based instruction, data-based planning, differentiation, and individualization, and evidence-based instructional strategies are identified and supported.



PRACTICE 1: Align curriculum, assessments, and instruction to the PA Standards

FOCUS ON CONTINUOUS IMPROVEMENT OF INSTRUCTION	NOT YET EVIDENT	EMERGING	OPERATIONAL*	EXEMPLARY
	No instructional materials or assessments demonstrate the rigor of the PA Standards.	Some instructional materials and assessments demonstrate the rigor of the PA Standards.	Instructional materials (e.g., lesson plans, unit plans, performance tasks, assessments, curriculum maps, scope and sequence documents, guides) and assessments for all subjects and grade levels are aligned with the rigor of the PA Standards. A formal process to review alignment is implemented annually. <small>*Refer to the Indicators of Operational Implementation document for "Look-Fors" aligned to this Essential Practice.</small>	Instructional materials (e.g., lesson plans, unit plans, performance tasks, assessments, curriculum maps, scope and sequence documents, guides) and assessments for all subjects and grade levels are aligned with the rigor of the PA Standards. Materials and resources are used in all classrooms and programs and continuously revised by educators and support staff to ensure alignment with student needs.
NOTES / EVIDENCE		GUIDING QUESTIONS		SOURCES OF EVIDENCE
		<ul style="list-style-type: none"> What is the evidence that our school has a written curriculum aligned to Pennsylvania's standards? How do we know that all educators understand how the content they teach builds on, or relates to, content in other grades/subjects? 		<input type="checkbox"/> Curriculum documents <input type="checkbox"/> Lesson Plans <input type="checkbox"/> Individualized Education Programs (IEPs) <input type="checkbox"/> Language Instruction Educational Programs (LIEPs) <input type="checkbox"/> Curriculum documents shared with families <input type="checkbox"/> Classroom visits <input type="checkbox"/> Educator survey <input type="checkbox"/> Educator focus groups

Page 1 of 18

Indicators of Operational Implementation for Schools

https://www.iu13.org/wp-content/uploads/2022/04/Indicators-of-Operational-Implementation-for-Schools_Nov-2021-1.pdf

Pennsylvania Essential Practices for Schools:

Indicators of Operational Implementation

CONDITION:

Focus on Continuous Improvement of Instruction



PRACTICE 1: Align curriculum, assessments, and instruction to the PA Standards

LOOK-FORS:

- A systematic and documented process is used to collaboratively review the school's curriculum for alignment to state standards, district curriculum, and student needs.
- The school's instructional materials and assessments are aligned to the PA Standards in every subject to ensure vertical and horizontal alignment by grade level.
- Curriculum documents and lesson plans include guidance for accommodations and modifications for all learners.
- IEPs and ELD plans reflect alignment to grade level standards and curriculum.
- School leaders are knowledgeable about PA Standards and the implications for teaching and learning.
- A written document articulating the school-wide model of instruction is in place.
- The standards-aligned curriculum is delivered with fidelity to all students.
- Lesson plans clearly reference grade-level, standards-aligned curriculum and reflect high expectations for all students.
- All instructional staff have access to curriculum-related materials and the training necessary to use curricular and data resources relating to the learning goals for the school.
- There is evidence of ongoing schoolwide dialogue about standards, instruction, and assessment with a focus on integrating the use of research-based practices.
- Educators frequently use the resources related to the PA Standards available on the SAS Portal.
- Classroom assessments are periodically reviewed to ensure alignment to grade-level expectations and learning targets and consistently measure intended outcomes.
- Classroom assessments evaluate student learning at a level of rigor comparable to the cognitive/performance level required by the PA Standards.

PRACTICE 2: Use systematic, collaborative planning processes to ensure instruction is coordinated, aligned, and evidence-based

LOOK-FORS:

- Policies and structures allow educators both individual and collaborative time weekly to use data and plan to meet student learning goals, cultivating mutual respect and collegiality among staff.
- Policies and structures support regular collaborative instructional planning between general and special educators, related service providers and paraprofessionals.
- Protocols for collaboration and evaluation of instructional effectiveness focus on planning and delivering grade-level, standards-aligned instruction.
- School leaders hold educators accountable for planning, teaching, and assessing in ways that promote student learning.
- Teachers have regular times to meet and discuss effective instructional practices (e.g. lesson study, professional learning communities).
- Time and support are available for individual and collective reflection and adjustment as well as shared learning and professional learning, to facilitate responsiveness to student needs.
- School and classroom assessments are vertically and horizontally aligned for coherence across grades and content areas.
- IEPs reflect integrated information, services and data from general educators, special educators and related service providers about how access to general curriculum will be provided.
- ELD plans reflect integrated information, services and data from general educators and ESL educators about how access to general curriculum will be provided.
- School leaders and educators engage in regular discussions of student learning expectations, both horizontally (with colleagues in their grades or subjects) and vertically (across grades).
- Systems are in place for educators to develop and share standards-aligned instructional materials and resources.
- Teacher teams regularly evaluate the impact of classroom instruction on student learning, and on addressing educational disparities across student groups.

Page 1 of 9

2. Conducting a Needs Assessment

Once the school vision is set, a needs assessment needs to be conducted. A needs assessment is a systematic process that is used to identify strengths and challenges within the context and constraints of the organization and dig deeper into the root causes of these challenges. It's important to note that an authentic needs assessment takes time and needs to ensure that all the necessary stakeholders are included. In this section of the website, there are tools and resources focused on facilitating an impactful and equitable needs assessment.

Within the Future Ready Planning Portal, schools are required to examine multiple layers of data as they work through the needs assessment. A challenge for schools is determining what data are needed to address their challenges. To effectively and efficiently assess needs, schools are encouraged to begin their needs assessment process through a decision-driven thinking process. The school teams need to define their questions and use the questions to collect more pertinent data that will help them uncover the answers and analysis of data for decision-making.

Within the Future Ready Planning Portal, schools are required to examine multiple layers of data as they work through the needs assessment. A challenge for schools is determining what data is needed to address their challenges. To effectively and efficiently assess needs, schools are encouraged to begin their needs assessment process through a decision-driven thinking process. The school teams need to define their questions and use the questions to collect more pertinent data that will help them uncover the answers and analysis of data for decision-making.

In order to have an effective needs assessment, teams should ensure that they have reflected upon what sources of data the school needs to address the challenges and strengths of the school.

For CSI and A-TSI schools, the school improvement facilitator is an important support to assist schools with the analysis of data. As each layer of data is explored, school teams are able to better determine their priorities and address the root cause challenges that are impacting their learners.

A needs assessment helps determine the needs, or gaps, between where we are and where we want to be. A needs assessment is an opportunity for a team to analyze the data in order to determine the strengths and areas of opportunity for leaders, teachers, and students of all student groups in reaching their mission and vision. It is important to use a variety of data – not just student outcome data – to determine needs.

Assessing the needs goes a step further than data analysis to include a root cause analysis which leads teams to address the problem rather than the symptom, eliminates wasted effort, conserves resources, and informs strategy selection. As part of this, it is particularly important to consider data in the context of a multi-tiered system of support as well as data that shine a bright light on disparities between student groups.

Criteria from the School Improvement Plan Review Rubric for School Level Needs Assessment: Timely and meaningful consultation with:

The LEA and school engaged in timely and meaningful consultation with a broad range of stakeholders and examined relevant data (e.g., student, educator, and community demographics; student achievement and growth; student and teacher attendance; student behavior; documents; classroom observations; surveys; focus groups; budget/allocation of finances) to understand the most pressing needs of students, educators, and/or other members of the school community and the potential root causes of those needs.

Criteria from the School Improvement Plan Review Rubric for Needs Assessment: Strengths and Challenges:

The plan demonstrates a deep understanding of the school's context, including internal community (e.g., teachers, student groups) and external community (e.g., parents, local area, district).

3. Root Cause Analysis

What is Root Cause? Root cause is defined as “the deepest underlying cause or causes of positive or negative symptoms within any process that, if resolved, would eliminate or substantially reduce the symptom” (Preuss, 2013).

Root Cause Analysis: Identifying the system of interconnected factors that contribute to the problem is the purpose of a root cause analysis.

Oftentimes, people assume that there is one correct “root of the problem.” Problems often stem from a system of interconnected factors. Root cause analysis allows us to break down those factors into parts so that we can address each individual part in a potential solution.

Guiding Questions for identifying the root cause:

What are the potential root causes of gaps with performance goals or inequities?

What is the underlying cause(s), that if resolved, would improve our implementation of the prioritized essential practice, or improve student engagement and readiness to learn?


Criteria from the School Improvement Plan Review Rubric for Root Cause Analysis:

The plan uses a diverse array of appropriate data sources and evidence to articulate, in specific detail, the root causes for each priority and includes a detailed explanation of the linkages between each priority’s rationale and its root causes. The linkages are easy to comprehend and logically and succinctly explain the root causes of each priority.

Additional resources to assist you with conducting a root cause analysis can be found at:

<https://www.iu13.org/school-improvement/pa-continuous-improvement/go/root-cause-analysis/>

The 5 Whys for Inquiry



National School Reform Faculty
History of Education Center www.nsrff.org

The 5 Whys for Inquiry

Developed in the field by educators affiliated with NSRF.

Purpose
To help the presenter get at the foundational root of his/her question and to uncover multiple perspectives on the question.

Presentation (3 minutes)
The presenter describes the context of his or her inquiry question. One might include...

- Why you chose this question
- Why it is so important to you
- How it relates to your work back home

Clarifying Questions (3 minutes)
The group asks clarifying questions. These are questions, which clarify the context of the presenter's remarks. They should be specific questions, which can be answered with brief statements. For example, “How long has your school been involved in place-based learning?” Or, “How many community members are involved with planning this project?”

Decision (3 minutes)
The group discusses the best line of inquiry to get at the heart of the question and decides upon the initial “why question”. The presenter is silent.

The “Why Questioning” (10 minutes)
The “why question” decided upon is asked and the presenter responds. Another “why question” is asked in response to the presenter's answer. This continues with a maximum of five “why questions” being asked.

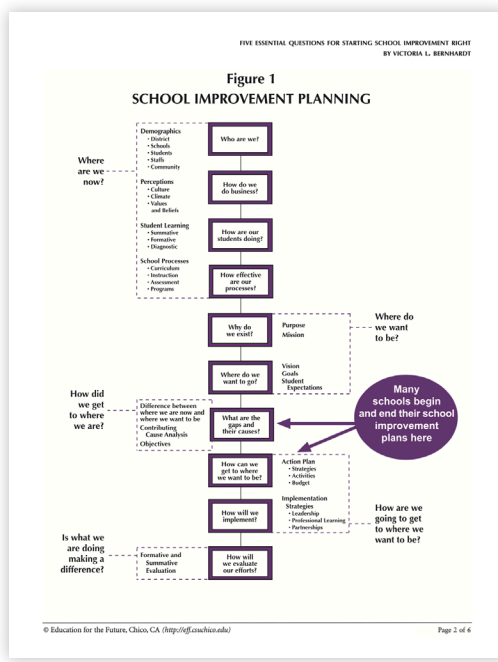
Discussion (5 minutes)
The group then discusses what they have heard the presenter say. Their discussion is not a solving of a problem but an attempt to help the presenter understand the underlying causes for the issue he or she described. The presenter is silent.

Response (3 minutes)
The presenter responds to what has been said. The group is silent.

Debrief (3 minutes)
The group and the presenter debrief the experience.

Protocols are most powerful and effective when used within an ongoing professional learning community such as a Critical Friends Group® and facilitated by a skilled coach. To learn more about professional learning communities and seminars for new or experienced coaches, please visit the National School Reform Faculty website at www.nsrff.org.

Bernhardt’s 20 Questions Protocol

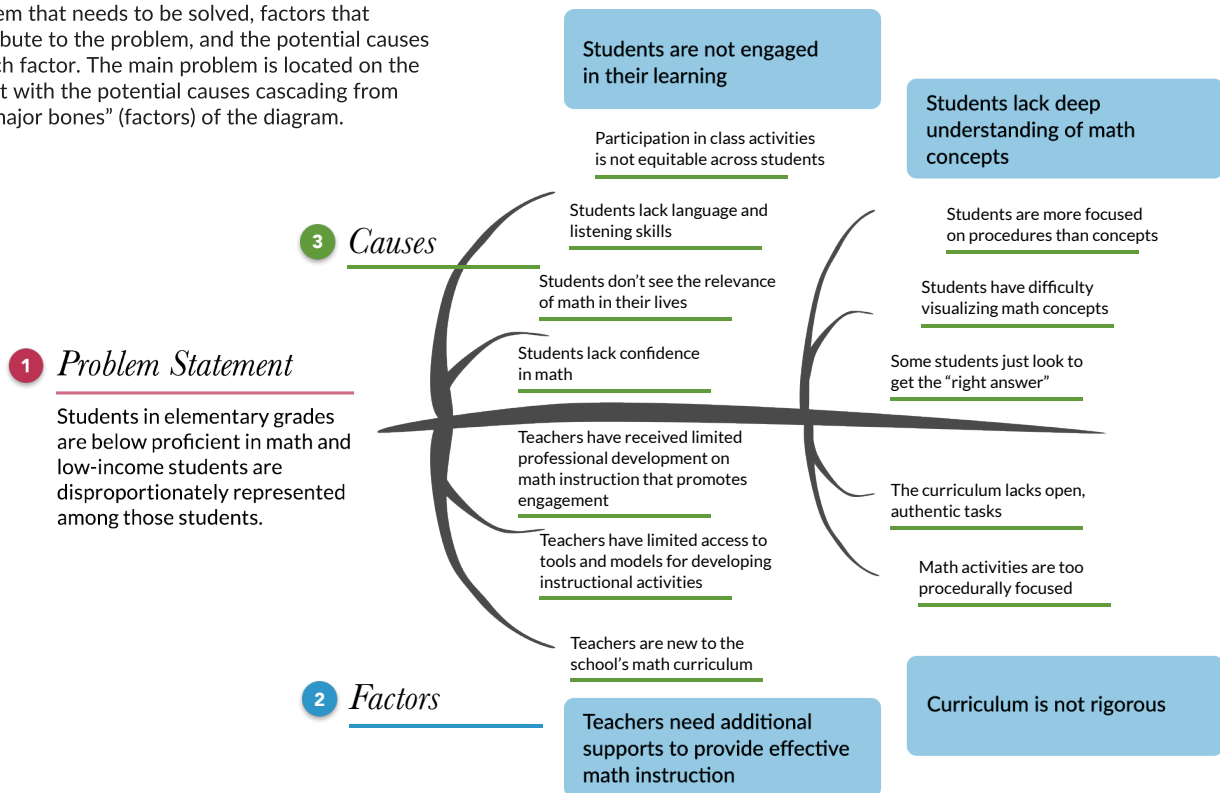


The Fishbone Diagram

Fishbone diagram



This completed fishbone diagram shows the problem that needs to be solved, factors that contribute to the problem, and the potential causes of each factor. The main problem is located on the far left with the potential causes cascading from the “major bones” (factors) of the diagram.



This document is a part of the Continuous Improvement in Education Toolkit, produced by the Regional Educational Laboratory Northeast and Islands.

These and additional resources to assist you with conducting a root cause analysis can be downloaded at:
<https://www.iu13.org/school-improvement/pa-continuous-improvement/go/root-cause-analysis/>

4. Priority Statements

A high leverage priority is an area of focus within our control that, if addressed successfully, will lead to sustained improvement in teaching and learning. It will shift the way we do business with observable outcomes now and measurable outcomes over time.

A priority statement clearly identifies a change in practice, structure, or system that, if improved, will lead to progress toward achieving the vision and long-term goal.

The priority statements should answer the following questions:

What needs to change for the school team to resolve the primary root cause?

How can a school team change their practice, structure, or system to better support educators, students, parents/guardians, or our community?

What makes a school team think that changing these ways will improve our progress toward achieving our vision and long-term goals?

Draft priority statements following an **“If...then...and”** format can support these questions. For example, **“If** we create a schedule in which teachers have common planning time (system, structure, or practice that you want to develop), **then** we will be able to collaboratively analyze student work and create plans aligned to student needs, **and** our students will have their learning needs met in order to grow and achieve.” Drafting priority statements with an **if.. then** thinking, can support a team in creating a theory of action for the work ahead.

A school improvement plan should list, in specific detail, two to three high-leverage evidence-based strategies that will be the focus for the plan’s designated time period. A clear, compelling rationale is provided for each priority that articulates why the priority needs urgent attention in order to realize the school’s vision.

Criteria from the School Improvement Plan Review Rubric for Priority Statements and Aligned Outcomes:

The plan lists, in specific detail, two to three high-leverage evidence-based strategies that will be the focus for the plan’s designated time period. A clear, compelling rationale is provided for each priority that articulates why the priority needs urgent attention in order to realize the school’s vision (i.e., the gap between what is currently occurring in the school and what the vision says should be occurring).

SECTION D

GO: Create a Plan

1. Benchmarks that reflect effective implementation

Student achievement represents one of the most, if not the most, highly and frequently prioritized tenets of school improvement across districts. Research shows that standardized test scores are not the only way that successful school improvement plans track this key component. Specifically, when measuring student achievement, school improvement plans typically focus on the following indicators:

- Rates of students performing at grade level by subject area
- Rates of proficiency on state assessments
- Graduation and attendance rates
- Rates of earning credits and grade level advancement
- Absenteeism and dropout rates

Because most school districts collect and have access to ample student achievement data, this component of school improvement typically represents a large piece of the continuous

Student attainment will often be measured against a benchmark appropriate to their age and year group. Best practice benchmarking involves the whole process of identifying, capturing, analyzing, and implementing best practices of high-performing schools. The definition of a benchmark is to measure something against a standard. Benchmarks are used to assess children on grade level to see where they are compared to other children in the grade. They can be used to identify a student's strengths and weaknesses.

Criteria from the School Improvement Plan Review Rubric for Measurable Goal Statements:

The plan includes at least two specific, feasible, and ambitious goal statements for each priority that represent high-leverage improvements that will influence substantial progress in toward realization of the school's vision.

High Quality Goal Writing

Goals should reflect the outcomes schools and districts intend to accomplish. A school must set clear goals to address issue areas throughout the school improvement planning process.

Once the team has a clear sense of where the school is currently, they can begin mapping out a strategy for progressing to where they want the school to be. The plan should include concise, measurable, and achievable goals and objectives that will lead to the path to success. A school improvement plan's purpose is to document goals, strategies, and action steps that aim to improve the quality of education students receive.

Well-structured goals are central to the school improvement process. They provide the vehicle through which student achievement is impacted in a school.

SMARTIE stands for **S**trategic, **M**easurable, **A**chievable, **R**ealistic, **T**imely, **I**nclusive, and **E**quitable—all characteristics of a well-crafted goal. Approaching goal-setting with a SMARTIE lens is an important practice for every person regardless of your role, tenure, or identity.

Identifying Attainable Goals

Across the board, experts and secondary research suggest that improvement goals should be rigorous yet attainable.

If goals are set too high, schools may find that improvement does not materialize and that stakeholders perceive efforts to be failures. Conversely, goals set too low typically fail to catalyze adequate improvement.

Measurable Goal Statements

Goal statements are general statements that focus on improving the level of student achievement. To create a goal statement, the team members should review the planning team's priority statement and the background information used by the planning team in arriving at its decision. For example, data on student achievement or the results of the parent survey.

The school improvement plan should include at least two specific, feasible, and ambitious goal statements for each priority that represent high-leverage improvements that will influence substantial progress toward resolution of the school's vision. All members of the team must agree on the goal statement.

2. Selecting Evidence-Based Strategies

Evidence-Based strategies are instructional practices, strategies, programs, and interventions that have been shown through rigorous evaluation to be effective at improving outcomes. Evidence requirements under the Every Student Succeeds Act (ESSA) are designed to ensure that states, districts, and schools can identify programs, practices, products, and policies that work across various populations and have produced results.

Selecting an evidence-based strategy is an important part of the school improvement process. If school teams can implement appropriate strategies that are aligned to goals and desired outcomes, the continuous improvement process can have a lasting positive impact on all students.

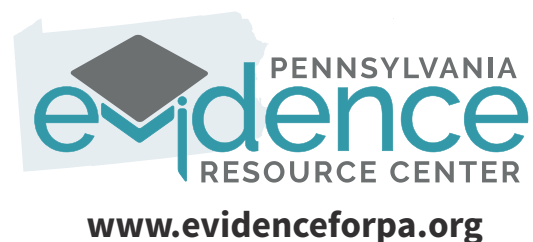
Where Does the Selection of Evidence-based Strategies Fit Within Continuous improvement?

In practice, the selection of strategies touches on aspects of each phase. After you have assessed the needs of your school, and while you are creating a plan, your team might begin to view some potential evidence-based strategies that may be a good fit.

Think about using the data you have collected during monitoring routines and as part of your facilitated self-assessment to determine how to move forward. At other times, your team might identify a particular challenge as part of a root-cause analysis which points them towards a particular strategy designed to improve outcomes in that area.

Meet the Evidence Resource Center (ERC)

Pennsylvania maintains a clearinghouse of evidence-based strategies that are aligned to PA Essential Practices, Future Ready PA metrics, and other academic, social/emotional, and learning environment needs. Every strategy on the ERC includes evidence of the strategy's effectiveness in improving targeted outcomes for students, staff, families or other groups within the school community.



Each piece of evidence on the ERC is rated at one of four tiers of evidence quality: ESSA Tiers 1, 2, 3, or 4. These tiers indicate *the strength of the evidence* that supports a particular strategy or intervention. For example, evidence at the highest tier (ESSA Tier 1: Strong) was demonstrated in a high-quality, rigorous study, and with a study population and setting that is a match to your local context.






ESSA Tiers can serve as a guide when selecting interventions:

The higher the tier, the more confident a school can be that, if the strategy is implemented with fidelity and in a similar context, they are likely to make progress in similar outcome areas.

The lower the tier, the weaker the evidence of effectiveness, and the more a school should plan to closely track their data and check in frequently on the strategy's impact.

PA's ESSA Tiers of Evidence

<https://www.evidenceforpa.org/assets/files/ERC-ESSA-Tier-Table.pdf>

PENNSYLVANIA'S ESSA TIERS OF EVIDENCE				
	<div>Tier 1</div> <div>Strong</div>	<div>Tier 2</div> <div>Moderate</div>	<div>Tier 3</div> <div>Promising</div>	<div>Tier 4</div> <div>Demonstrates a Rationale</div>
Study Design	1+ well-executed, well-designed experimental study Meets WWC Design Standards without reservations	1+ well-executed, well-designed quasi-experimental study Meets WWC Design Standards with reservations	1+ well-executed, well-designed correlational study Controls for selection bias	A test using validated instruments has occurred* Well-defined logic model A plan for further study underway
Group Formation	Randomized controlled trial (RCT)	Nonrandom methods, with baseline equivalence	Nonrandom methods, controlling for selection bias	No minimum requirement
Statistical Significance <small>p < .05</small>	✓	✓	✓	✋ Small but favorable effect* *May vary state to state.
Countervailing Evidence <small>from other high-quality causal studies</small>	✗ Must be no countervailing evidence from other high-quality, causal studies	✗ Must be no countervailing evidence from other high-quality, causal studies	✗ Must be no countervailing evidence from other high-quality, causal studies	✗ Must be no countervailing evidence from other high-quality, causal studies
Sample	350+ study participants	350+ study participants	No minimum participants	No minimum participants
Setting	 More than one school or district*	 More than one school or district*	No requirement	No requirement
Context	 Similar to your population and setting	 Similar to your population or setting	No requirement or does not match your setting or place	No requirement

*Source states have differed (ESSA Tiers 2 and 4) so that may vary from this table. Be sure to consult your state's ESSA materials for alignment.

Pennsylvania Evidence Resource Center | www.evidencecenterpa.org

Schools that are designated as CSI are only permitted

to use school improvement funds to support the

implementation of strategies with evidence at ESSA Tiers 1, 2, or 3. It is recommended that schools and LEAs consult with their local Federal Programs contact to discuss the eligibility of planned activities.

Schools are required to consult the ERC when selecting evidence-based programs for their improvement plan. They also can and should browse [other high-quality clearinghouses](#) and topic-specific resources, to get a broad view of the evidence landscape and other potential solutions.

Encourage your school teams to browse clearinghouses independently and as a group, discussing high-potential strategies and deepening their understanding with further research. Finding evidence of effectiveness is a first and important step, but a detailed discussion should follow about whether or not a strategy:

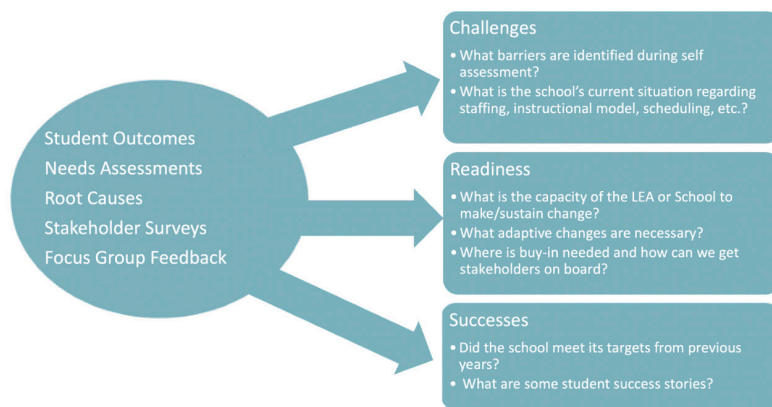
Addresses the right outcomes – Does this strategy improve the specific areas we are working to address?

Will adapt well to our context – If our setting or population is different from that of the school where the intervention was studied, how will we adapt the strategy for our needs?

Is a good fit – Is this strategy practical, feasible, affordable, and are we ready to implement it?

Are we ready?

When considering possible strategies, it is crucial to consider the school's readiness for a particular strategy alongside the identified challenges and successes. Ultimately, even the best-intentioned school team cannot implement a change for which they lack capacity and readiness. Keep in mind that the goal of continuous improvement is to improve outcomes for all students, and those outcomes should be sustainable within the building.



The 18 essential practices give us an organized guide to conduct a robust review of existing systems and identify key leverage points for planning what’s next. Based on the school’s context and the data review, determine the comprehensiveness of the needs assessment.

Aligned but Overlapping

The best strategies lie at the intersection of a school’s success and challenges and the school’s readiness for a particular change. In short, any potential strategy must address identified challenges, take advantage of the school team’s momentum with prior successes, and also be a strategy that the school is positioned to implement with fidelity.



Overlapping circles of Readiness, Challenges and Successes.

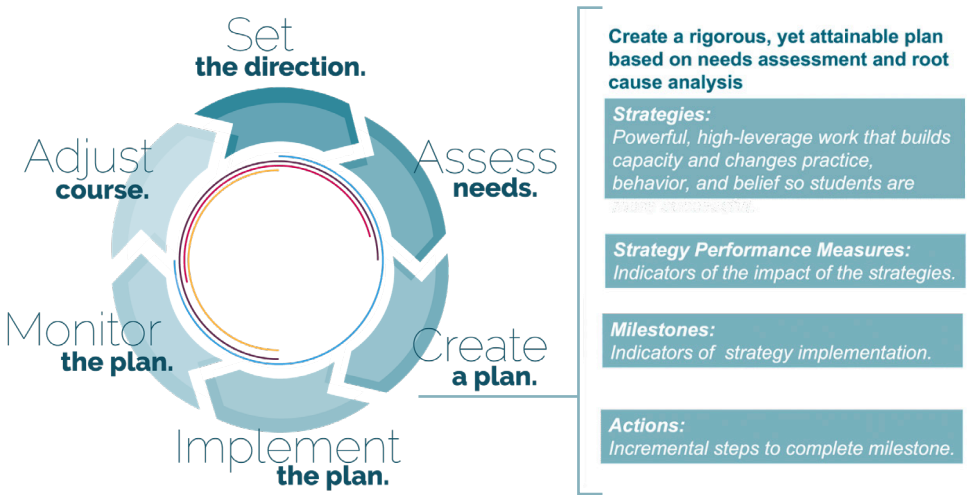
Another resource that can assist a school in ensuring their plan is aligned and cohesive is a throughline template. [This Throughline Example resource](#) provides both a template and a linked example.

3. Action Planning for Success

A significant step in the planning process is addressing how to implement each evidence-based strategy (EBS). In other words, you know what you are trying to do; what specific steps are required to prepare and implement the strategy with fidelity? One approach to addressing these questions is to start your team’s planning work using an Action Plan Template.

Purpose of Action Planning

Action planning takes all the work you’ve done so far and translates it into an actionable plan for effective implementation. Action plans should include discrete action steps that are necessary to implement the selected evidence-based strategies with fidelity.



Creating the Action Plan

- Creating an action plan can begin shortly after choosing your Evidence-Based Strategies because creating a plan with a strategy in hand allows your team to use any descriptions or guidance regarding a specific strategy as a guide to crafting action steps.
- After selecting a strategy, it might be beneficial for a subset of the school's improvement committee to begin drafting an action plan for each strategy.
- Creating smaller teams for plan writing allows for distributed work on plan creation which eases the burden on individual members.
- Plan drafts, additions, changes, and shifts should be shared periodically with the full improvement committee to help ensure stakeholder engagement throughout the planning process for continuous improvement.

4. Professional Development

In any improvement or transformation work there is a need to ensure that professional learning and development are provided to support the identified priorities.

When your school is implementing a new strategy, it is an excellent opportunity to develop an effective professional development plan to support teachers and staff in implementing that strategy. A critical aspect of this is ensuring that there are tangible ways that participants demonstrate their learning in their daily practice.

The professional learning plan includes opportunities for school leaders, educators, and support staff to acquire, enhance, and refine the knowledge, skills, and practices necessary to implement the selected strategies with fidelity. This implementation should include specific expectations for and measures of participant learning.

SECTION E

GO: Implementing the Plan

1. Preparing for Implementation

Now that your plan is written, it is time to turn strategy into action with plan implementation.

Strategy into Action

In this phase, evidence-based strategies that are aligned with the school's priority statements will be put into action by school-based implementation teams. These teams will carry out the action steps described in the school improvement plan in order to achieve the established measurable goals. To implement a plan, implementation teams will:

- Become familiar with the strategy to be implemented.
- Assess their level of knowledge of the strategy.
- Plan for regular (bi-weekly) progress checks with Implementation Team members.

Familiarizing Yourself with the Evidence-Based Strategy

Before jumping in to putting your action steps into action, it's best practice to become familiar with the evidence-based strategy that will be implemented. Consider accessing a variety of resources that describe the strategy and reviewing them with implementation in mind.

The NIRN Hexagon Discussion Analysis Tool offers questions to consider. Specifically, review the questions in the "Fit" section of the tool. This is the same Hexagon Tool mentioned in previous lessons and courses.

The NIRN Hexagon Discussion Analysis Tool can be used as a planning tool to guide selection and assess the fit and feasibility of potential programs and practices for use. It includes three program indicators and three implementing site indicators.

NIRN Hexagon Discussion Analysis Tool

https://nirn.fpg.unc.edu/sites/nirn.fpg.unc.edu/files/imce/documents/NIRN%20Hexagon%20Discussion%20Analysis%20Tool_September2020_1.pdf

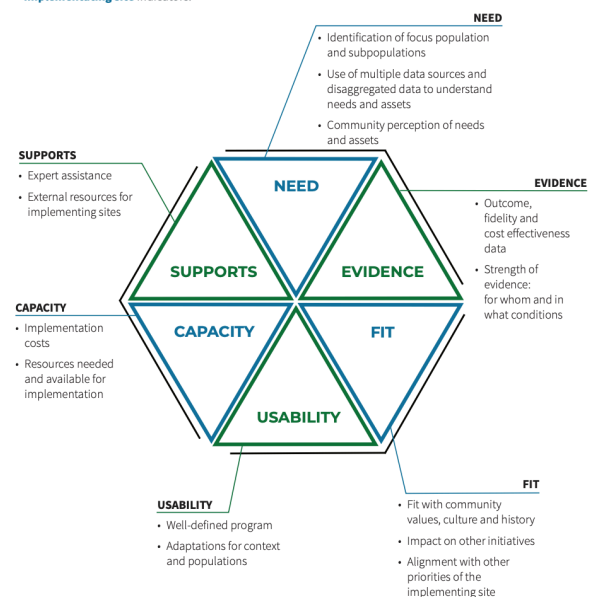
Criteria from the School Improvement Plan Review Rubric for Implementation Timeline:

The plan includes a detailed, comprehensive schedule/timeline of events and procedures to be completed during the plan's designated time period.

For each priority, the plan includes an array of specific indicators that serve as incremental checkpoints to measure the school's current progress toward improving those priorities. All indicators are meaningfully and intentionally aligned with each priority.

The Hexagon: An Exploration Tool

The Hexagon can be used as a planning tool to guide selection and assess the fit and feasibility of potential programs and practices for use. It includes three **program indicators** and three **implementing site indicators**.



The following form provides three tools to enhance the work of implementation teams as they prepare to enact upon their action plans:

Task Breakdown & Communication



Task Breakdown & Communication

This document provides three tools to enhance the work of implementation teams as they prepare to enact upon their action plans.

Task Breakdown: This template provides a space for teams to review upcoming action steps and break them down into more discrete tasks to be completed.

Challenges to Consider: This table guides a team to predict challenges they may encounter as they implement their action steps and proactively plan for ways to address these challenges.

Communication Plan: This template is intended to guide teams to be intentional and explicit in their communication to stakeholders. By completing this template throughout the implementation process, the team will determine appropriate information to share with each stakeholder group, how to share that information and when. Communication will not be left to chance.

Task Breakdown

Action Step	Tasks Needed to Accomplish Action Step

Challenges to Consider

What challenges does the team expect to encounter?	Ideas for addressing the challenges:
<i>If...</i>	<i>Then...</i>

Communication Plan

Who needs to be aware of these actions?	Who will prepare communication?	Who will approve communication?	Who will communicate?	Method and Timeline for Communication

Example:

Task Breakdown

Action Step	Tasks Needed to Accomplish Action Step
Create Attendance Committee that consists of a sample of teachers, parents/guardians, and students	<ol style="list-style-type: none"> 1. Create document that states what committee members will be responsible for 2. Create communication to staff to ask for volunteers 3. Ask teachers for recommendation of 2-3 students to ask to join the committee 4. Ask teachers for recommendation of 2 parents/caregivers to ask to join the committee
Select streamlined communication system	<ol style="list-style-type: none"> 1. Decide what it is we are going to want a communication system to do 2. Email colleagues from other schools to ask for recommendations 3. Search for communication systems that meet our criteria 4. Create spreadsheet to for tracking systems and their capabilities 5. Schedule demonstration with 3 companies 6. Review each system in regard to our needs and their capabilities 7. Select best option

Challenges to Consider

What challenges does the team expect to encounter?	Ideas for addressing the challenges:
<i>If...</i>	<i>Then...</i>
Teachers may not know their students well enough to recommend someone.	We could ask teachers who had students the previous year.
Teachers may not know their students' parents/guardians well enough to recommend someone.	We could survey students to see who is interested.
Students may not want to join this committee.	<p>We could offer incentives.</p> <p>We could hold meetings over lunch and offer to buy something they like.</p>

Communication Plan

Who needs to be aware of these actions?	Who will prepare communication?	Who will approve communication?	Who will communicate?	Method and Timeline for Communication
Teachers	Sandra	School Principal	Sandra	Sandra will present the information at the next faculty meeting.
Students	Lindsay	School Principal	Classroom Teachers	Lindsay will prepare the communication and give it to teachers to talk to students during class.
Parents	Brian	School Principal	School Principal	Text message will be sent through our messaging system.

Download the PDF of this form at the bottom of this website page <https://www.iu13.org/school-improvement/pa-continuous-improvement/>

2. Technical Assistance Plans

For CSI or A-TSI schools, the IU SIF should create a technical assistance plan. The purpose of documenting Technical Assistance is:

To align resources | Many schools receive support from the LEA, IU, external partners and, school personnel

To identify and address gaps in Action Plans | Schools may have action steps that need to be unpacked and require support to be accomplished

To document how support will be evaluated

TA Plan Components

Goal for Technical Assistance and Support: Based on prioritized needs, identify specific supports and objectives for technical assistance.

Priority/Goal: Identify the priority or goal from the School Improvement Plan with which this support/assistance is aligned.

TA/Support Strategy: Specifically identify what Technical Assistance (TA) services and activities will be provided and by whom (SIF, IU, LEA, other). This should be noted under Responsible Parties on the Technical Assistance Plan.

Required Materials, Resources, or Supplies: Identify any materials/supplies needed and who will provide them.

Cost or Hours: Specify how much of the school's allocation for CSI or A-TSI SSoS is required to implement this TA/support strategy.

Anticipated Outputs: List 2-3 tangible products or observable events/milestones/ shifts in practice to provide evidence that you are implementing the action plan with fidelity.

Evaluation Plan: Describe how the team will monitor the implementation of the assistance and support plan.

Criteria from the School Improvement Plan Review Rubric for Action Steps:

The plan includes a comprehensive series of detailed, specific, and ambitious action steps for each goal statement. Listed action steps demonstrate an innovative approach toward realizing the goal statements. All action steps are intentionally aligned with and provide a logical scaffolding to realize the respective goal statements.

Criteria from the School Improvement Plan Review Rubric for Person(s)/ Position Responsible:

Responsible parties are listed for each action step. The distribution of action steps to responsible parties is varied and not concentrated around a few people and/or groups.

SECTION F

GO: Monitor the Plan

1. Monitoring Structures and Tools

When a school creates a plan for improvement, school teams select evidence-based strategies that they think will be effective for improving student outcomes in a variety of areas. Schools monitor the plan after the start of implementation. However, in practice, implementation, monitoring, and adjusting course are interconnected in important ways and can't ever be completely separated.

The simplest way to state the importance of plan monitoring is to say that regular monitoring is a way to be sure that a given strategy is having the desired impact with students. In practical terms, sufficient monitoring can mean the difference between spending money and time on a strategy that isn't working quite right versus noticing challenges early on and adjusting course quickly to try and overcome them.

In the work of school improvement, taking opportunities to monitor plan progress is also how a school team can begin to see the impact of their efforts. Without a regular check to see “how are we doing?”, a school team might put a lot of effort into an evidence-based strategy and not know whether or not it was having the desired impact for a long time. Schools and students can't afford to be using a program that isn't effective.

In order to be effective, progress monitoring should go deeper than checking boxes to make sure action steps are done. Monitoring meetings should never be held out of compliance or to fulfill a requirement, but instead should be conducted with the intention of understanding the improvement work happening in the school and making the necessary adjustments. During scheduled monitoring sessions, school teams should take the opportunity to make connections between the work being done by adults and the outcomes they are seeing with their students.

Frequent use of student, classroom, and school-level data to evaluate outcomes is essential to ensuring effective implementation. It is imperative for the futures of the students in every school that leaders, teachers, and staff engaged in progress monitoring go beyond compliance and engage with implementation and outcome data to ensure effective and sustainable changes in schools.

Schools that incorporate regular monitoring throughout the school improvement process see improved student outcomes because regular monitoring enables the school to review data and adjust course when necessary. Teams assigned to monitor the plan can be made up of people with a variety of roles in the school. After all, the entire school should be involved in the work of school improvement somehow.



2. Taking Action

Implementation Teams need to schedule regular check-ins to review progress on their work. An example agenda (see figure at right) may include:

1. Review tasks from previous meeting. Mark each as either:
 - complete
 - in progress
 - behind
2. Review “behind” tasks and identify how to move forward.
3. Review upcoming action steps and determine tasks that need to be complete for each.

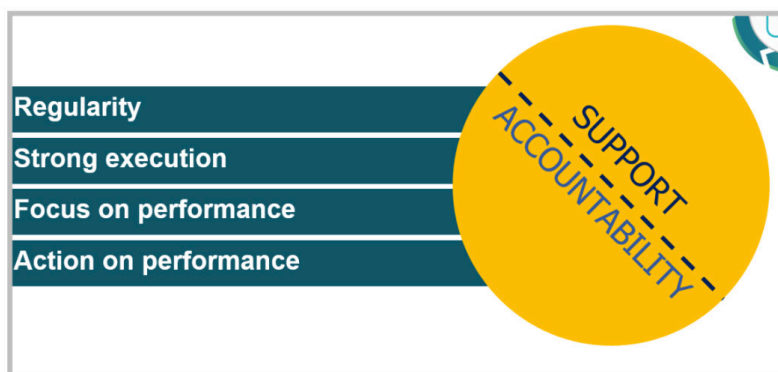
(Date) Bi-Weekly Attendance Team Check In																	
Time:																	
Attendees:																	
School Vision:																	
To Prepare For This Meeting Please:																	
Schedule 30 minutes																	
TIME	MIN	ACTIVITY															
	5	Check-in <ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Meeting Objectives: <ul style="list-style-type: none"> ◦ Review tasks from previous meeting. ◦ Review the Bi-Weekly template to determine upcoming tasks. • Review Norms <ul style="list-style-type: none"> • • Roles: <ul style="list-style-type: none"> ◦ Facilitator: ◦ Note Taker: ◦ Next Steps Tracker: ◦ Timekeeper: ◦ Bi-Weekly Template Updater: 															
	5	Review next steps from this meeting <table border="1"> <thead> <tr> <th>What will happen</th> <th>By Whom</th> <th>By When</th> </tr> </thead> <tbody> <tr><td> </td><td> </td><td> </td></tr> <tr><td> </td><td> </td><td> </td></tr> <tr><td> </td><td> </td><td> </td></tr> <tr><td> </td><td> </td><td> </td></tr> </tbody> </table>	What will happen	By Whom	By When												
What will happen	By Whom	By When															
	5	What worked well about this meeting and what we would have liked to change? <table border="1"> <thead> <tr> <th>What worked during this meeting?</th> <th>Ideas for improving the next meeting:</th> </tr> </thead> <tbody> <tr><td> </td><td> </td></tr> <tr><td> </td><td> </td></tr> <tr><td> </td><td> </td></tr> <tr><td> </td><td> </td></tr> </tbody> </table>	What worked during this meeting?	Ideas for improving the next meeting:													
What worked during this meeting?	Ideas for improving the next meeting:																

3. Monitoring Routines: Biweekly, Monthly, Quarterly

The purpose of a routine is not to review every piece of data, but rather to celebrate successes, discuss challenges, and define actional next steps to make meaningful progress toward goals.

What is a Routine?

Routines are regularly scheduled checkpoints to assess if the school’s plan is on track. A well-executed routine is an engine that drives implementation forward. Routines serve to monitor performance and provide opportunities for collaboration focused on diagnosing and addressing problems. In short, a routine is an opportunity to have the right people in the room having the right conversation at the right time!



Strong routines have four characteristics in common:

- Regularity
- Strong execution
- Focus on performance
- Action on performance

Monitoring routines can involve both data related to implementation AND impact, but preparing data is often a stumbling block for schools. Sometimes schools only “gather data” the day before they need it. Other times, there is only one “data person” who knows how to bring it all together - this person also typically fills the Analyst role. However, evidence from schools implementing PA’s cycle of improvement show that having data prepared for review in advance of a monitoring routine helps to make the time spent in the meeting more productive.

Also, schools where teams regularly collect data ahead of routines tend to have a stronger data culture and see a direct connection between their strategy and improved student outcomes.

More than just a useful structure for a meeting, a routine should eventually become “how we do business” in a school. With a routine structure in place, everyone attending a session where a school will be monitoring plan progress should know what to expect and understand their role in the proceedings.

Types of Routines

Routines vary only in purpose, not in structure. Regardless of whether the school is engaged in a quarterly, monthly, or some other monitoring routine, the meeting structure and roles are consistent. However, monthly monitoring routines serve different purposes than bi-weekly routines. This section will lay out those different purposes and provide some guidance on how to prepare for each one.

Bi-Weekly Routines

Bi-weekly routines give school teams the opportunity to report and understand implementation progress. Early in the implementation progress, it is best practice to formalize even bi-weekly meetings to ensure that everyone on the team is informed. However, some schools find it helpful to hold less-formal bi-weekly meetings as time goes on and team members are perhaps communicating more often about progress. As a way of increasing ownership over school improvement, school teams can practice distributed leadership within their building by limiting bi-weekly meetings to implementation teams for specific strategies.

The purpose of the bi-weekly meeting is to keep the implementation team updated on the status of action steps and to identify any immediate adjustments that can be made to help accomplish in-progress action steps. Bi-weekly meetings typically do not involve student outcome data.

Bi-Weekly Routine Outcomes

Implementation teams should come away from a bi-weekly monitoring session with a clear understanding of strategy implementation as well as clear next steps for completing any outstanding action steps.

In order to hold a bi-weekly routine, a school team will need the following:

Bi-Weekly Implementation Tracker

Download at <https://www.iu13.org/school-improvement/pa-continuous-improvement/effective-implementation/>

This bi-weekly implementation tracker can assist implementation teams with monitoring and adjusting course.

(Date) Bi-Weekly Attendance Team Check In																	
Time:																	
Attendees:																	
School Vision:																	
To Prepare For This Meeting Please:																	
Schedule 30 minutes																	
TIME	MIN	ACTIVITY															
	5	Check-in <ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Meeting Objectives: <ul style="list-style-type: none"> ◦ Review tasks from previous meeting. ◦ Review the Bi-Weekly template to determine upcoming tasks. • Review Norms <ul style="list-style-type: none"> • • Roles: <ul style="list-style-type: none"> ◦ Facilitator: ◦ Note Taker: ◦ Next Steps Tracker: ◦ Timekeeper: ◦ Bi-Weekly Template Updater: 															
	5	Review next steps from this meeting <table border="1"> <thead> <tr> <th>What will happen</th> <th>By Whom</th> <th>By When</th> </tr> </thead> <tbody> <tr><td> </td><td> </td><td> </td></tr> <tr><td> </td><td> </td><td> </td></tr> <tr><td> </td><td> </td><td> </td></tr> <tr><td> </td><td> </td><td> </td></tr> </tbody> </table>	What will happen	By Whom	By When												
What will happen	By Whom	By When															
	5	What worked well about this meeting and what we would have liked to change? <table border="1"> <thead> <tr> <th>What worked during this meeting?</th> <th>Ideas for improving the next meeting:</th> </tr> </thead> <tbody> <tr><td> </td><td> </td></tr> <tr><td> </td><td> </td></tr> <tr><td> </td><td> </td></tr> <tr><td> </td><td> </td></tr> </tbody> </table>	What worked during this meeting?	Ideas for improving the next meeting:													
What worked during this meeting?	Ideas for improving the next meeting:																

Task Breakdown & Communication Protocol

See full document on pages 26-27 of this guide.

Task Breakdown & Communication



This document provides three tools to enhance the work of implementation teams as they prepare to enact upon their action plans.

Task Breakdown: This template provides a space for teams to review upcoming action steps and break them down into more discrete tasks to be completed.

Challenges to Consider: This table guides a team to predict challenges they may encounter as they implement their action steps and proactively plan for ways to address these challenges.

Communication Plan: This template is intended to guide teams to be intentional and explicit in their communication to stakeholders. By completing this template throughout the implementation process, the team will determine appropriate information to share with each stakeholder group, how to share that information and when. Communication will not be left to chance.

Task Breakdown

Action Step	Tasks Needed to Accomplish Action Step

Challenges to Consider

What challenges does the team expect to encounter?	Ideas for addressing the challenges:
If...	Then...

Communication Plan

Who needs to be aware of these actions?	Who will prepare communication?	Who will approve communication?	Who will communicate?	Method and Timeline for Communication

Monthly Routine

Monthly monitoring routines focus on the implementation of the action plan but are an opportunity for teams to go deeper on understanding the barriers to implementation each month. Schools can use the bi-weekly implementation tracker as a rich source of data to drive these deeper discussions in their monthly routines. Monthly routines are also an opportunity for teams to review implementation with an eye toward evaluating the school's progress toward measurable goals in the upcoming quarterly routine.

During the monthly routines, implementation teams can discuss which action steps are in-progress, completed, behind, etc. If steps are behind, teams should discuss ways to complete those steps. If steps are in progress, teams should address how to complete the steps on time and avoid any setbacks. Monthly routines are when teams might adjust or add action steps to the plan or assign new responsibilities to team members.

Objectives of Monthly Monitoring:

To overcome identified barriers to implementation | This does not necessarily mean reducing or eliminating tasks and outputs.

To enhance implementation along the way by adding additional steps when appropriate | As conditions in the school change, implementation of a given strategy may require more or different action steps

To develop a clear plan for who will accomplish the remaining action steps before the next bi-weekly or monthly meeting

Monthly Routine Outcomes

Implementation teams should come away from a monthly routine with a deeper understanding of implementation as well as clear next steps for completing any outstanding action steps with a specific eye towards attaining measurable goals.

In order to hold a Monthly monitoring routine, a school team will need the following:

Materials	People	Data	Time
•Bi-weekly monitoring sheet •School Improvement Plan	•All Implementation Teams •Building Leaders	•Status of action steps •Supporting Documentation	•60 minutes

Quarterly Monitoring

The overarching purpose of quarterly monitoring is to ensure schools are making progress toward their school improvement goals. More specifically, monitoring routines allow schools to collect and review outcome data related to their selected evidence-based strategies, evaluate progress toward benchmark attainment, and to formulate solutions and next steps.

Notes From the Field : Quarterly monitoring routines are an extremely important aspect of school improvement. These routines are when the school teams critically evaluate data relevant to benchmark targets as a way of checking progress toward the school's measurable goal.

Furthermore, the quarterly routine is an opportunity for implementation teams, school leaders, and LEA leaders to work through challenges from the last quarter and identify next steps based on the data presented.

During quarterly routines, school improvement teams should not simply admire the problem, but spend the majority of their time finding a way to overcome that problem and improve the educational experiences of their students. This is especially true if the school does not attain its benchmark target. A discussion that uses the available data to adjust course to see change in the next quarter will be far more productive than spending the entire routine discussing why things didn't get done. After all, those issues should have been addressed as a result of the bi-weekly routines or the monthly routines.

Objectives of Quarterly Monitoring:

To evaluate impact data and assess the need for adjustments

To consider the connection between implementation and impact using outcome data

Develop a clear plan for adjusting the plan so that everyone understands what will be done and who will do it

Quarterly Routine Outcomes

School teams should come away from a quarterly routine with a deeper understanding of the connection between the implementation of their chosen strategy and the outcomes they've seen in their data. Implementation teams, as well as building-level and LEA leadership, should also have clear next steps, which may include adjusting the course, to ensure that the school can meet its next set of benchmarks and ultimately achieve its measurable goals.

As a requirement of the Every Student Succeeds Act (ESSA) quarterly monitoring routines are the manner by which the Pennsylvania Department of Education (PDE) monitors the implementation and the impact of school improvement plans.

In order to hold a Quarterly monitoring routine, a school team will need the following:

Materials	People	Data	Time
•Bi-weekly monitoring sheet •School Improvement Plan •Quarterly Routine Data Deck	•All Implementation Teams •Building Leaders •LEA Leaders	•Student outcome data relevant to benchmark targets •Process data related to each distinct strategy	•60-90 minutes

Establishing Monitoring Routines

Remember, the purpose of the routine is to collect data on implementation or benchmark progress, formulate solutions, and define the next steps. Once there is a clear, shared view of progress, use that to set objectives during the routine. While the data for monthly monitoring routines will focus on the implementation of the action plan and schools can use the bi-weekly implementation tracker as a rich source of data and discussion, the quarterly routine is focused on progress toward goals and uses student outcomes - or other data relevant to a school's evidence-based strategy - to decide on ways to adjust course when necessary.

Routines are designed to be conversations between the “right people at the right time”. Some schools might find that school and LEA leaders only need to attend the quarterly routines to be knowledgeable about progress on measurable goals and commit to specific next steps to adjust or stop/start actions as needed. Other schools may need to make administrative decisions in a monthly meeting to address identified barriers to implementation. In truth, each monthly and quarterly may require different people to attend depending on the topics on the agenda.

Importance of Data Collection

In order for routines to be effective, it’s important that a school has a system in place for data collection and analysis. Furthermore, routine data should be distributed to meeting participants at least 2 days prior to the meeting time. This tactic ensures that people have enough time to review the data and come to their own understanding of it before the routine - those present at the routine can then spend less time unpacking the data and more time working on addressing barriers and successes.

4. Communicating progress to stakeholders: Implementation and performance data

In order to help ensure that effective implementation and continuous improvement occur, it is critical that a school plan for the ways in which they will communicate priorities, goals, and progress with stakeholders.

Remember, stakeholder engagement is an important part of the school planning process and should continue throughout the process. When your team is developing a plan to communicate progress, consider the different types of data you might be sharing and how best to do so with members of your community. This section will provide some insights on using different types of school improvement data to have conversations with both internal and external stakeholders.

When developing a plan to communicate progress, consider newsletters, emails, and some social media outlets as ways of promoting the work being done at the school.

Reporting Implementation Data

Implementation data that is shared with stakeholders can consist of anything from status updates on action steps related to evidence-based strategies to process-oriented data that speaks to the work happening at the school.

Sharing updates on new programs helps to keep parents, teachers, and students updated on how things are going and builds a sense of transparency that can help promote community involvement and buy-in with future changes.

In order to solidify that feedback loop, it will become increasingly important to listen to stakeholder feedback throughout the process when sharing implementation data and engage with their feedback in a meaningful way. Below are some steps to ensure that you can report implementation data effectively.

Steps to Ensure that you can Report Implementation Data Effectively:

Celebrate successes and highlight next steps. Doing so ensures that the school community is focused on evidence and oriented toward making change. It is OKAY to point out missed targets, deadlines, and the challenges that contributed to them, but school teams should avoid admiring the problem. Updates on implementation progress should always include next steps or updated action steps that will help the school move beyond its identified barriers to implementation.

Be prepared to explain implementation data. Implementation data, like action step status collected in the Bi-Weekly Implementation Tracker, is a way to structure your stakeholder communication in a meaningful way. Knowing what has been done to implement a strategy, and what may be needed to move forward ahead of time, will show that you are invested in making a difference for your students and in reaching the goals.

Be specific and clear about your strategies. When you are identifying the successes and the challenges give specifics so all stakeholders have a clear picture of what has been done or what needs to be done.

Proactively manage change. School improvement work can surface a lot of emotions for students, parents, teachers, and administrators. Some schools find that communicating with the parents and the community invites criticism and negative reactions. However, this isn't always the case.

Sometimes schools are facing external barriers that the community has no idea about. Communicating clearly about the work being done shows what the school is doing to improve education and can help identify ways to move beyond barriers that may not have been possible from within the school itself. Any time clear communication is possible, a school can eliminate the potential for stakeholders to fill a communication vacuum with their own narratives about the school.

Reporting Performance Data

Student performance data are everywhere. From the Future Ready Index to student report cards, it may seem like people are inundated with performance data and more will just confuse the issue.

Similarly, some school teams may feel like previous attempts to share and discuss performance data have gone poorly for various reasons. However, this does not have to be the case moving forward. It is important to share performance data related to benchmarks and goals because stakeholders appreciate transparency.

Share a Data Story

- A data story highlights the successes and challenges while not dwelling on the data itself. Especially when a specific target is not met, it is important to highlight all the evidence of progress toward that target that the school has on hand.
- Keep in mind that school teams should avoid admiring the problem and strive to call out the adjustments that the data are leading you toward.
- Data stories can be narratives about the work that highlight successes or examples from the data that show growth.
- Many schools find that it helps to contextualize their data by presenting data in terms of the number of students improving/growing rather than as a percentage point.

Be Solution-Oriented

- When your team is identifying the challenges through your performance data, consider what is needed to move beyond those challenges.
- Be prepared to share identified next steps and be ready to hear additional ideas from stakeholders.
- When accepting feedback from stakeholders, remember to assume positive intentions.
- Parents, community members, staff, and students all want the school to succeed and sometimes it takes listening to find an effective approach.

Focus on What You Can Control

- While there may be challenges that are out of your control, focus on what you can control or influence.
- Focusing on what the school can control means highlighting upcoming instructional or programmatic shifts and steering clear of larger community issues or calling on stakeholders for more engagement in the process.

SECTION G

GO: Adjust Course

Targeted and Timely Adjustments

The decision of whether to make adjustments to a school improvement plan or not is an important one. School teams can use data gathered during routine plan monitoring to inform a new direction if they determine a necessary change. Keep in mind that the school improvement work is carried out by adults to benefit their students. As such, most adjustments to school improvement plans lie with the fidelity of implementing any given evidence-based strategy. In this section, you will learn a bit about where fidelity comes from, how teams can evaluate their work, and how to adjust the plan given unexpected outcomes.

Fidelity of implementation: Did we do what we said we would do?

Evaluating the work of school improvement in any given building can be an emotional process for many reasons. School teams want to do well and work hard for their students, and it can be difficult to reflect on the work and determine that more could be done. Luckily, there is an objective way to evaluate implementation regardless of where the team identifies a need for an adjustment.

1. Adjusting the plan using IMPLEMENTATION DATA

Adjustments are inevitable and a part of the process.

School teams should work to write a plan that is flexible enough to accommodate adjustments but clear enough to be implemented by anyone in the school. However, creating a plan for a school that accounts for every possibility would be impossible. If a change is needed, it's not a failure of the plan or implementation team, but instead, the team should see value in the process that helped them to realize a change was needed.

When school teams use data and monitor the plan regularly, the need for adjustments is easy to recognize, and school teams are better positioned to make changes when necessary. To keep the action plan on track, implementation data are used to indicate progress, adjust actions, and revisit milestones. Adjustments to strategy implementation are based on identified implementation barriers and student outcome data relevant to the school's benchmarks.

Regular routines ensure that appropriate data are readily available and that discussions can be more results-focused than compliance-driven across the entire school system. When school teams view monitoring routines as a way to build capacity rather than merely identify shortcomings adjustments to the plan will become more commonplace.

How to know when an adjustment is necessary:

Avoid the temptation to change strategies or abandon action plans too soon or with too few data points. When engaged in school improvement, school teams should take a systematic approach to adjusting school plans.

Here are some guiding principles to consider when faced with the prospect of adjusting action plans.

Based on analyses of performance measures and anticipated output completion, does this strategy need to be revised?

School teams make the final decisions regarding adjustments to the plan using the same line of questioning used in root cause analysis. The goal is to understand why the adjustment was needed and whether it addressed the issue in a way that positively impacted progress or results. For example, Did a strategy get implemented as intended and how is that evident? Based on the team's evaluation and reflection of goals and implementation, they make recommendations for modifying action steps or other aspects of the plan.

Based on analyses of performance measures and anticipated output completion, do action steps and anticipated outputs need to be revised, added, or deleted?

Monthly and quarterly routines inform what adjustments are needed. When adjustments are made, they are justified and communicated to staff. This could include changes to progress monitoring tools, professional learning, resource allocation and human capital alignment.

When adjustments are made, are they monitored carefully to determine if they positively impact progress?

Monthly and quarterly routines inform what adjustments are needed. When adjustments are made, they are justified and communicated to staff. This could include changes to progress monitoring tools, professional learning, resource allocation and human capital alignment.

School teams don't have to guess about whether or not the outcomes they are seeing warrant a change. Teams should refer to the information about the strategy or specific assessment being implemented. Often there will be a description or specified outcome associated with implementation with fidelity.

If the practices are meeting or exceeding expectations outlined by the selected evidence-based strategy, the school should continue them and expand the plan to include additional classrooms or schools. However, there are a few scenarios when adjustments to the plan might be necessary.

If the school team's analysis shows that implementation was not systematic across the district or school, the team must identify gaps and include them in the plan action steps to ensure effective implementation.

Changes to implementation might include adding or altering action steps to address these identified barriers. School teams should avoid changing due dates for action steps, or eliminating steps all-together, just to stay "on time" with their plan. If a step is important, it is worth completing even if it is behind schedule. Teams should work with building and LEA leadership to help remove barriers to implementation like scheduling, missing resources, or needed policy changes.

Teams modify or eliminate strategies when evaluating whether they were fully implemented as intended, and they determine that expected improvements did not occur. Teams also should consider eliminating a strategy when the resources or efforts needed for full implementation exceed the benefit received.

The decision to eliminate a strategy or program is big and should not be taken lightly. Schools often have many programs that overlap, and schools should stop programs that aren't working, but the decision to stop a program or strategy should be based in data from regular monitoring. It is unlikely that sufficient data will be gathered within a month or so to know for sure whether to continue a strategy or program. When school teams often do not see their desired outcomes with students, it comes down to a lack of rigorous implementation. When teams consider eliminating a program based on data, it is always a good idea to look at implementation data one more time to be sure there were no missed barriers. In practice, implementation data are easy to pass over and it can be easy to miss an opportunity to improve implementation because teams want to believe that they have done everything they can do.

Monthly Monitoring: What is implementation data?

Adjustments are made based on data.

Monthly monitoring routines focus on implementing the action plan, but are an opportunity for teams to go deeper on understanding the barriers to implementation each month. Schools can use the bi-weekly implementation tracker as a rich data source to drive these deeper discussions in their monthly routines. Monthly routines are also an opportunity for teams to review implementation to evaluate the school's progress toward measurable goals in the upcoming quarterly routine.

During the monthly routines, implementation teams can discuss which action steps are in-progress, completed, behind, etc. If steps are behind, teams should discuss ways to complete those steps. If steps are in progress, teams should address how to complete the steps on time and avoid any setbacks. Monthly routines are when teams might adjust or add action steps to the plan or assign new responsibilities to team members.

Guiding Questions for process evaluation:

- What factors most influenced our capacity to complete this action step: resources, activities, and outputs?
- Would completing more or different activities or having access to different resources change the observed outcomes?
- What does completing the process tell us? Why is it important?

2. Adjusting the plan using IMPACT DATA

Quarterly Monitoring – What is impact data?

The overarching purpose of quarterly monitoring is to ensure schools are making progress toward their school improvement goals. More specifically, monitoring routines allow schools to collect and review outcome data related to their selected evidence-based strategies, evaluate progress toward benchmark attainment, and to formulate solutions and next steps.

Notes from the Field: Quarterly monitoring routines are an extremely important aspect of school improvement. These routines are when the school teams critically evaluate data relevant to benchmark targets to check progress toward the school's measurable goal. Furthermore, the quarterly routine is an opportunity for implementation teams, school leaders, and LEA leaders to work through challenges from the last quarter and identify next steps based on the data presented.

During quarterly routines, school improvement teams should not simply admire the problem but spend most of their time finding a way to overcome that problem and improve the educational experiences of their students. This is especially true if the school does not attain its benchmark target. A discussion that uses the available data to adjust course to see a change in the next quarter will be far more productive than spending the entire routine discussing why things didn't get done. After all, those issues should have been addressed due to the bi-weekly routine or the monthly routines.

Guiding Questions for school teams considering adjustments:

- Outcome Evaluation:
 - What were the results of our actions?
 - What are the implications for completing these action steps?
 - Did we implement the evidence-based strategy with high fidelity?

- Short-term outcomes
 - Are the short-term outcomes we see consistent with those expected with the implementation of the evidence-based strategy with high fidelity?
 - Where are students now, and has there been evidence of improvement or growth?
 - What data do we have that can determine whether or not to adjust?
- Long-term Outcomes
 - Have we met our benchmarks or goals?
 - If not, was it because of barriers to implementation, an insufficient action plan, or was the strategy not aligned to our goals?
 - What evidence of student growth or change do we have?
 - If we stick with this strategy for another year, will we see the outcomes we are looking for then?

Why we don't change our goals – we change our actions

It can be tempting to alter short-term and long-term goals to make a better “match” with unexpected outcomes in the school’s data. However, regardless of whether or not a school meets a benchmark or achieves a goal, high-quality goals provide information about progress in school improvement. When a benchmark is met, the school knows they are on the right track and making impactful changes. When a school doesn’t meet a benchmark the implementation team can still get valuable insights into how students are doing.

School teams should avoid moving goals for two more reasons: first, just like how moving the goals - or changing the rules - during the game isn’t fair to either team, moving the goals in the middle of a plan doesn’t serve the school team or the students because altering goals can make it much harder to identify changes and understand progress.

The second reason to avoid changing goals too early is that altering the goal doesn’t change the work that is necessary for the school to make a change. Remember, school improvement is about the work that adults do in schools to make a difference for students. In many cases, adjusting goals mid-year means the goal will be attained without changing how the school “does business.” While there are specific cases where changing a goal might be appropriate, for the most part, school teams should focus on adjusting their implementation with a careful review and revision of action steps when the need for a change is identified.

Adjusting goals (to keep growing) is only advisable in special cases:

When there have been significant changes in the school’s current context such that the goals are no longer possible

Example 1: A school that had planned on using a specific assessment platform for measuring ELA progress no longer has access to that assessment at the start of the year. This school might adjust the goal to indicate a different assessment that they do have access to.

Example 2: The school has been operating with a virtual instructional model for an extended period, and behavior/office referral goals are no longer applicable. This school would determine another measure of impact for their chosen strategy that is appropriate for virtual instruction.

When a school team reviews their goals at the beginning of the school year and realizes their goals are not aligned with the strategy or their goals don't meet SMARTIE criteria.

Example: A school's first quarter goal is to have 95% of students take an exam. The school should seek to adjust the goal from outputs to outcomes, even if those outcomes are just establishing a baseline for the rest of the year.

Example 2: The school realizes that their ELA strategy addresses comprehension, but their goal is written to measure reading fluency. The school can adjust the language of the goal to align with the outcomes predicted by the chosen strategy.

In every other case, school teams should look to adjust their implementation of the evidence-based strategy. This includes instances where (1) the team predicts they will not hit the target, (2) the team sees the goal as "too difficult" for the staff or students, and (3) any other time there is worry about "not meeting" the goal. For schools engaged in school improvement, the most important thing to do is evaluate data from regular monitoring or school progress to evaluate the need for change every time - regardless of whether a benchmark was attained.

If school teams avoid changing goals, how can they change their work to see the outcomes we are striving for?

Implementation Teams can adjust action steps through various methods:

- Adjusting timelines
 - Do Create realistic timeframes
 - Don't remove steps that are still important
- Adding action steps
 - Do consult materials on the evidence-based strategy or assessment guidebooks for any steps the team might have missed initially
 - Don't make action steps too big or all-encompassing - aim for discrete steps that are manageable within the allotted time
- Owning the process and leading change
 - Do practice distributed leadership
 - Don't make one person responsible for every new step

3. Beyond the Plan

Adjusting course to build on team progress and building internal capacity

Given the investment of time and resources into choosing a particular strategy, it is better only to consider adjusting or switching strategies at the end of a school year or when developing a new plan for next year. It's important to give new approaches a realistic amount of time to show an impact, but there are times when a new strategy might be necessary. To help decide, here are two questions to ask yourself when beginning to plan for the next school year:

Does our progress monitoring data support a change in strategy?

Notes from the Field: If implementation has been done with fidelity and teams are still not seeing the outcomes they expected, it may be due to another factor within the school that is preventing the current strategy from working to its full potential.

School teams should use the planning process to conduct thorough Facilitated Self-Assessment and Root Cause Analysis to help determine a new strategy.

Are the strategies aligned with the goals and priorities?

Notes from the Field: It is possible that the strategy selected when making last year's plan does not align to the goals and priorities of the school.

By using monitoring data and comparing the predicted outcomes of the evidence-based strategy with the school's goals, schools can determine if the strategy aligns with their priorities. If a change is needed, school teams should look closely at different strategies to find one that aligns more closely with the school's priorities.

Identify current and future capacity needs - addressing capacity through PL and human capital development

A major goal of any school improvement effort should be to enact lasting changes that are sustainable within a school building regardless of who is on staff, who is leading the building at the time, and which students are currently enrolled. School improvement is about the adults in the building working hard to create the best education for their students that they can. In short, school improvement takes a great deal of human capital to carry out. The good news is that when the necessary human capital isn't already present, it can be developed in a few different ways.

When teachers and staff go to a learning session and leave without a way to apply what they've learned or improve their skills, it is ultimately a waste of resources for the school. When professional development opportunities connect to the work of teachers and staff and provide avenues for sustainable change, those opportunities are developing human capital. While professional development is not the only solution, it is a key part of school improvement.

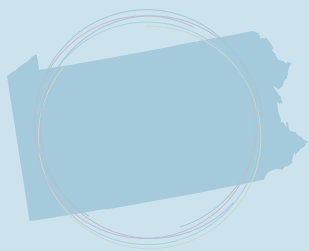
When your school is choosing or beginning to implement a new strategy, it is an excellent opportunity to develop an effective professional development plan to support teachers and staff in implementing that strategy. Investing in technical and adaptive development for school teams is an important way to grow internal capacity within a school building. Increased capacity helps to make changes implemented while engaged in school improvement sustainable. Finally, a critical aspect of professional development and building capacity at a school is ensuring that there are tangible ways that participants demonstrate their learning in their daily practice.

Criteria from the School Improvement Plan Review Rubric for Monitoring/Evaluation Plan:

Self-assessment and reflection practices are meaningfully incorporated into the school's routines.

Professional development, whether for a new plan or new strategy, should be closely connected to the intended strategy. All school team members will likely need some form of learning when it comes to new strategies. Understanding those needs might be best understood using an inventory of instructional practices. School teams might also use the data collected during a facilitated self-assessment or a root cause analysis to inform where the capacity needs are for a school.

Moving beyond the plan means that the cycle of school improvement becomes a way of life for schools. To move away from yearly plans, school improvement is the everyday work of school leaders and teachers and not something that is “in addition” to the everyday work of running the school. Engaging in school improvement work is something that every school can benefit from and following the structures outlined in this series of modules will help guide schools through that work.



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



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