



PA Essential Practices Self-Assessment Guide

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

INTRODUCTION

There is a substantive evidence base identifying explicit conditions and practices that are most critical for improved teaching and learning for all students. Drawing from decades of school improvement research, lessons from leading states and reflections on successes and challenges in our local statewide system of support, Pennsylvania’s school improvement efforts will enhance our approach to school improvement beginning with a more robust focus on essential conditions observed in schools that have shown significant and sustained gains in student achievement:

- Employ intentional practices for improving instruction;
- Establish a school-wide community of practice through leadership, shared responsibility, and professional collaboration;
- Provide student-specific academic, social, emotional, and behavioral supports to all students; and
- Provide evidence-based, job-embedded professional learning for all leadership and staff.

Through a [pilot in Spring 2018](#), the Pennsylvania Department of Education (PDE) and 19 schools across three diverse districts (Allentown School District, Juniata County School District and Pittsburgh Public Schools) field-tested tools and a process to improve our capacity to diagnose and correct the systemic issues that undergird the performance challenges in individual schools. Through authentic collaboration with Superintendents from these three districts and their teams, we explored the following:

- A more robust approach to assessing the conditions and practices associated with rapid and sustained improvement in teaching and learning;
- Integrating state-level initiatives within the context of current district systems and priorities; and
- Authentic empowerment of district and school communities to prioritize improvement efforts that are most pressing for the students they serve.

Feedback from pilot participants contributed to the final design of a rubric for measuring current implementation of 18 essential practices, as well as an evidence-based self-assessment process completed by a committee of diverse stakeholders and relies on data from a variety of sources to ensure an objective and reliable assessment.

This guidebook, the PA Essential Practices for Schools and their Communities rubric (Appendix A) and supplemental materials (Appendix B) are designed to improve the focus of the comprehensive needs assessment in two key ways:

- Improve our capacity to diagnose and correct the systemic issues that undergird performance challenges in individual schools; and
- Increase the efficiency and efficacy of school improvement efforts and sustain progress over time.

PA ESSENTIAL PRACTICES FOR SCHOOLS AND THEIR COMMUNITIES

The purpose of the PA Essential Practices for Schools and their Communities is to provide formative feedback and inform school improvement efforts. The data gathered through the 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 PA Essential Practices for Schools and their Communities provides critical information and feedback on the progress districts and schools are making toward improving student outcomes.

- Schools designated for CSI or Title I schools designated for A-TSI will utilize the PA Essential Practices for Schools as part of the comprehensive needs assessment process beginning in the 2018-19 school year.
- Schools will update their Essential Practices Assessment in Spring of each subsequent school year.
- PDE will use the Essential Practices Self-Assessment to inform deployment of support and assess progress over time for CSI and A-TSI schools and their LEAs.

STRUCTURE OF THE ESSENTIAL PRACTICES RUBRIC

The PA Essential Practices for Schools and their Communities is divided into four core conditions:

1. Focus on Continuous Improvement of Instruction;
2. Empower Leadership;
3. Provide Student-Centered Support Systems; and
4. Foster Quality Professional Learning.

Within each condition, discrete practices are defined to provide a clear playbook for schools in their efforts to establish and maintain these core conditions for success. For each practice, a rubric is provided to describe the progression of implementation across a continuum from “not yet evident” to “exemplary”. Although the descriptors within the implementation continuum are unique to each practice, to give you a general sense of the meaning of each of the four implementation stages, Figure 1, below, shows the universal meaning and progression across the implementation continuum.

Figure 1. Universal Meaning and Progression across the Implementation Continuum

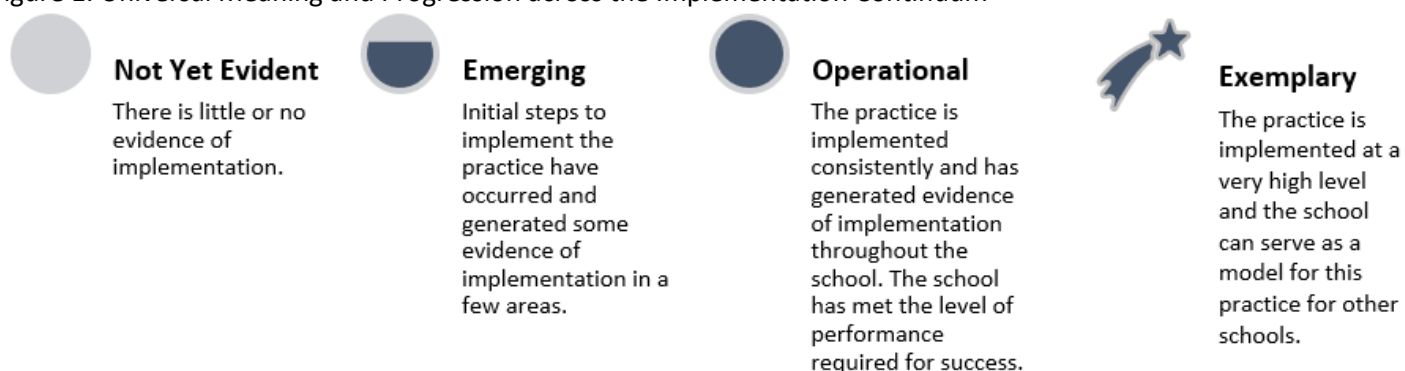


Figure 2, below, provides an example of how the implementation descriptors are applied and more specifically defined for a specific essential practice.

Figure 2. Sample Implementation Continuum for a Specific Essential Practice

PRACTICE 2: Use systematic, collaborative planning processes to ensure instruction is coordinated, aligned, and evidence-based			
NOT YET EVIDENT	EMERGING	OPERATIONAL	EXEMPLARY
There is no evidence of collaborative instructional planning among educators.	Time for collaboration between educators is scheduled, but limited to a few educators, grade levels, or subjects. Use of collaborative planning time is not structured or monitored.	The schedule includes time for collaboration for general education, special education, and ESL educators. Use of collaborative planning time is structured and impact on teaching and learning is monitored.	The schedule includes time for collaboration for general education, special education, and ESL educators and paraprofessionals. Use of collaborative planning time is structured and systematically evaluated to ensure it helps all educators continually align and improve their practice.

PA ESSENTIAL PRACTICES SELF-ASSESSMENT PROCESS

The Essential Practices Self-Assessment is a collaboration between school leadership and diverse stakeholders and LEA leadership and staff. The process is designed to determine the current status of implementation of 18 evidence-based practices that foster sustained improvement in teaching and learning for all students in a manner that:

- Promotes shared responsibility for school improvement among a diverse group of stakeholders across the school community; and
- Relies on a comprehensive array of sources of evidence to establish a valid and reliable assessment of a school's current level of implementation of practices that are fundamental for sustained improvement.

The Essential Practices Self-Assessment is not an evaluation of any one individual or stakeholder group. It is a formative assessment of the school's current implementation of 18 practices that are essential for sustained improvement in student outcomes. It is important for the school team to keep this in mind and continuously reinforce the school community's understanding of the purpose of the self-assessment throughout the process.

Prior to conducting the self-assessment, review the listed materials in the following order:

- PA Essential Practices for Schools and their Communities Rubric (Appendix A)
- PA Essential Practices for Schools and their Communities: Quick Reference Guide (Appendix B.1)
- PA Essential Practices for Schools and their Communities: Indicators of Operational Implementation (Appendix B.2)

Step 1: Form a School Improvement Steering Committee

Each school should begin the PA Essential Practices Self-Assessment process by forming a School Improvement Steering Committee. As per the requirements of the Every Student Succeeds Act (ESSA), this committee should include the principal/chief school administrator and other school leaders, teachers, students (if a secondary school), parents/guardians, and members of the community. Additionally, PDE highly encourages schools designated for CSI or A-TSI to follow the guidance provided by the [Council for Chief State Schools Officers and Partners for Each and Every Child](#) and make extra efforts to engage with 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.

The guiding questions below can help school leaders identify the most appropriate members to serve on the School Improvement Steering Committee.

- Who will provide insight to understand the needs of students and why our school has been designated for support and improvement?
- Are there untapped stakeholder groups who are critical to engage in our improvement efforts? Do we need some stakeholders with a fresh perspective?
- How will we engage union leadership and union-represented educators and support staff?

Some examples of additional stakeholder groups to consider in forming your School Improvement Steering Committee include:

- | | | |
|--------------------------|------------------------------------|--|
| • Elected Officials | • Civil/Human Rights Organizations | • Professional Associations |
| • Governmental Agencies | • Early Learning Leaders | • Physical and Mental Health Professionals |
| • Advocacy Organizations | • Philanthropy | • Nonprofit/Business Community |
| | • Higher Education | |

It is recommended that the size of the School Improvement Steering Committee be limited to no more than 15 people. The voices of a larger sample of stakeholders will be captured through surveys and focus groups.

Step 2: Prepare for the PA Essential Practices Self-Assessment

During this step, the School Improvement Steering Committee will collaboratively collect and organize a variety of sources of evidence.

On the day of the self-assessment, please ensure the materials below are organized and readily accessible for your team's review.

- School mission and vision
- Current school improvement or school plan
- Master schedule & staff list
- List of Professional Learning Communities
- List of school teams/committees and members
- Staff, student, and parent/guardian handbooks
- School budget
- Curriculum documents and related communication/materials shared with families
- Samples of formative assessments and benchmarks
- School administrator classroom visit schedule
- School-based classroom visit protocol
- School-based professional learning plan
- MTSS Data
- PBIS Matrix
- Random samples of:
 - Meeting agendas and minutes (e.g., school leadership team meetings, grade group meetings, faculty meetings, parent/community meetings, etc.)
 - Redacted lesson plans
 - Redacted Individualized Education Programs (IEPs)
 - Redacted English Language Development (ELD) plans
 - Reports pulled from your data warehouse/data system used for decision-making
 - Completed, redacted classroom visit feedback protocol
 - Redacted graded student work samples across grades, subjects, and student groups
 - Redacted student data notebooks
 - Redacted discipline referral forms
 - Professional learning agendas and related materials
 - Professional learning evaluation data
- Future-Ready PA Index Data
- Data analysis and action planning protocols used by:
 - School leadership team
 - Educators
 - Others (if applicable)
- Student Survey data
- Educator survey data
- Parent/Guardian survey data
- Student focus group themes
- Educator focus group themes
- Student Performance Data (Multi-Year)
 - State assessments and PVAAS
 - Diagnostic assessments
 - Benchmark assessments
 - Early literacy assessments
 - Kindergarten readiness assessments

What if we are missing some of these materials?

The materials outlined in this checklist are intended to be a starting point, providing your team with concrete information to objectively determine your current level of implementation of each of the PA Essential Practices for Schools and their Communities.

If your school does not have one or more of the requested materials, please do not create something for the purposes of the assessment.

Important Note about Stakeholder Surveys and Focus Groups. Surveys and focus groups are both very effective methods to solicit input from a wide variety of stakeholders. If your LEA already administers surveys to educators, students, and parents/guardians, your school is encouraged to crosswalk the survey items with the PA Essential Practices for Schools and their Communities and use those items as sources of evidence for the respective practice(s). It is highly recommended that the survey data be no more than one year old. If the surveys were last administered more than one year ago, we encourage you to administer them again prior to engaging in the PA Essential Practices Self-Assessment.

If your LEA does not currently administer annual stakeholder surveys, PDE encourages you to use the stakeholder surveys we secured from the Consortium for Chicago Schools Research. See Appendix C for copies of the surveys.

If you are interested in administering these surveys, please contact Rosemary Hughes (Special Advisor on School Improvement) at c-roshughe@pa.gov to develop a plan for survey administration. It is highly recommended that survey administration occurs at least four weeks prior to your scheduled PA Essential Practices Self-Assessment.

Depending on the size of the school community, three to five focus groups with students and three to five focus groups with educators should be conducted prior to the PA Essential Practices Self-Assessment. The focus groups should be facilitated by neutral individuals who would typically engage in honest discussions about student or educator experiences in the school facilitate the focus groups. For example, school counselors or another adult in the building whom students trust would be the most ideal person to facilitate student focus groups. Lead teachers, mentors, or coaches might be best fit for facilitation of educator focus groups. The presence of rating supervisors in focus groups is discouraged, as this typically compromises focus group discussion and candor.

Focus group protocols are included in Appendix C. Each focus group should include no more than eight participants and include a diverse, random selection of students and educators. For schools designated for A-TSI, focus groups would be most effective if selection of students and educators was focused on the student group(s) for which the school was designated.

Feedback gathered through focus groups should remain anonymous. Focus group data should be presented in the aggregate as themes that emerged across each of the stakeholder-specific focus groups. If a direct quote is powerful to include in the evidence the School Improvement Steering Committee will review in the self-assessment, then do not attach a name or any information that can be traced back to the individual who provided the quote.

Important Note about School Improvement Steering Committee Preparation. Through the pilot in Spring 2018, PDE learned that having individual School Improvement Steering Committee members complete an anonymous self-assessment of the PA Essential Practices for Schools and their Communities prior to the group self-assessment is highly effective. This allows time for individual members to learn the contents of the rubric and prepare initial thoughts about their own perceptions of the school's current implementation of each of the 18 essential practices. Identify a point person to collect and collate the individual committee member responses and create a summary sheet that tallies how many members rated the school in each implementation level for each practice prior to the scheduled PA Essential Practices Self-Assessment.

Step 3: Complete the PA Essential Practices Self-Assessment

On the day of the scheduled PA Essential Practices Self-Assessment, it is important to identify members of the School Improvement Steering Committee who will serve in the following roles:

- **Facilitator** = Person responsible for guiding the School Improvement Steering Committee through review of relevant sources of evidence and discussion of agreed-upon rating for each of the 18 essential practices. For schools designated for CSI, the facilitator will be a member of the assigned Regional Improvement Team. For schools designated for A-TSI, the facilitator will likely be a member of your regional Intermediate Unit. For all other schools, it is best if the individual is an objective, neutral member of the team with experience facilitating group decision-making.
- **Note-taker** = Person responsible for capturing key points of discussion about the evidence for each of the 18 essential practices, as well as the group's agreed-upon rating for each practice.
- **Curator of evidence** = Person responsible for organizing and ensuring the committee's access to the possible sources of evidence for each essential practice as the group moves from one practice to the next.

The Facilitator should start by reminding the School Improvement Steering Committee of the purpose of the PA Essential Practices Self-Assessment. Be sure to reinforce the fact that this is a formative evaluation of the school's current status of implementation, not an evaluation or indictment of any one individual or stakeholder group. Establish norms for engagement in the self-assessment that create conditions for safe, open discussion about what the sources of evidence suggest about the current implementation of each practice. Keep the group focused on the sources of evidence – not anecdotal perceptions.

A recommended process for reviewing each Practice is the following:

1. Begin the review process with the Practice 1.
 - a. Present the School Improvement Steering Committee with the tallies of members who rated the school as "Not Yet Evident", "Emerging", "Operational" and "Exemplary" during the anonymous, individual rating process.
 - i. If there is a great deal of diversity in ratings, provide 20-30 minutes for the committee to dig into the sources of evidence associated with the practice outlined in the PA Essential Practices for Schools and their Communities Quick Reference Guide. Use the in-depth review of evidence to reach greater consensus about the school's current implementation of the practice. The committee does not have to reach 100% agreement. A minimum of 80% agreement is acceptable to establish a consensual rating and move to the next practice.
 - ii. If there is a high degree of consensus in the anonymous, individual ratings, provide 10 minutes for the committee to quickly scan the sources of evidence associated with this practice in the PA Essential Practices for Schools and their Communities Quick Reference Guide. Use this quick scan to confirm whether the evidence supports the initial consensual rating.
 - If the evidence supports the initial rating move to the next practice.
 - If the evidence suggests the initial rating was too low or too high, take an additional 10 minutes to discuss the rating supported by the evidence and establish a new, more objective consensual rating and then move to the next practice.
 - b. Document the agreed upon rating on the PA Essential Practices for Schools and their Communities: Summary Rating Sheet (see Appendix B.3).
2. Repeat this process for each practice until you complete these steps for each of the 18 practices.