

# School Improvement Plan – Guidelines and Process

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## *Preplanning:*

It is important to have clear roles for the planning team. Some questions to help guide the identification of roles that will assist in the process:

- Who will be the point person to manage the logistics for the planning process?
- Who will facilitate team meetings and exercises?
- Who will actually 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?

The enclosed guide will provide questions to facilitate improvement planning with your school community, as well as action steps for completing each section of the plan template and links to resources that school teams may consult as they engage in the action steps outlined in each step.

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# I. School Level Narrative

## *School Building Information*

### **Steps to Complete this Section:**

1. Type the requested information into the space provided.
2. Ensure that the information entered in the space provided matches information in the EdNA system.

### *A. School Improvement 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 [ESSA §§ 1111(d)(1)(B) (CSI) and 1111(d)(2)(B)(ii) (TSI)]. Title I Schoolwide schools are required to have parents, community representatives, and a secondary student (if applicable) as participants on this committee.

### **Steps to Complete Section I.A.:**

1. Identify members for your school’s School Improvement Committee.
2. Enter their names in the “Committee Members and Positions in School/ Community” table.
3. Describe the efforts school leaders took to ensure that the committee is comprised of a diverse group of community members who are involved and invested in LEAs, schools, programs, and outcomes for students.
4. Describe the role of the committee in developing this school improvement plan, as well as the intended role of the committee in the implementation and monitoring of the plan.

### **Resource:**

[\*Meaningful Local Engagement Under ESSA: A Handbook for LEA and School Leaders\*](#)

PDE highly encourages schools to make 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.

### **Guiding Questions for Schools:**

- Who will provide insight to understand the needs of our 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?
- Which stakeholders will bring a fresh perspective to our work?
- How will we engage union leadership and union-represented educators and support staff?
- How will we engage the School Improvement Committee in each phase of the cycle of improvement to ensure their voice is represented and they share responsibility for these efforts?

### *Indicator of Exemplary Planning:*

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

## *B. School Level Vision for Learning*

Effective organizations have a clear direction that informs the work of all employees. Establishing an agreed-upon vision for the school is the first step in plan development for the committee. 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 all 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 specific focus on vision for student groups targeted for school improvement.

### **Steps to Complete Section I.B.:**

1. Facilitate a discussion about your school's vision for students with your School Improvement Committee.
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. In the left column of the table, type your agreed upon vision statement.
5. As a committee, identify the measures of success aligned to the 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?

### *Indicator of Exemplary Planning:*

The vision should be stated in a concise, coherent, and bold statement that:

- Specifically articulates a long-term vision and a measure of success for students;
- Demonstrates compelling evidence of alignment to the most pressing school community needs and the school's commitment to and passion for continuous improvement; and
- Easily translates to both internal and external stakeholder groups, especially students.

## II. School Level Needs Assessment

Once the school vision and measures of success are set, a needs assessment is 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 root causes of these challenges. The needs assessment goes beyond student data to include data on the prevalence of effective practices. It includes a thorough examination of practices, processes, and routines that impact teaching and learning. (Refer to the PA Essential Practices Toolkit to conduct this needs assessment process.)

### *A.-C. Strengths and Challenges*

Through the needs assessment, the school should establish 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) and how these internal and external factors impact achievement of your vision and attainment of your long-term goals for students.

#### **Steps to Complete Section II.A. – II.C:**

1. Collect and organize sources of evidence that will be used in the needs assessment (demographics, achievement and growth, climate and culture, instructional core).
  - Administer stakeholder surveys and summarize the ratings for each item.
  - Conduct stakeholder focus groups and summarize the key themes for each question.
2. Facilitate a comprehensive needs assessment with your school improvement committee.
3. Describe how the LEA and school engaged a broad range of stakeholders and examined relevant data to understand the most pressing needs of the school community. (II.A.)
4. With your vision and goals in mind, identify outcome areas and Essential Practices that are positively contributing to achievement of your vision. (II.B.)
5. With your vision in mind, identify outcomes areas and Essential Practices that are hindering achievement of your vision. (II.C.)
6. Select 2-3 challenges as the foci for improvement. Select “Yes” in the third column for the prioritized challenges and “No” for the rest. (II.C.)
7. For each prioritized challenge, conduct a root cause analysis to identify the primary reason your school is experiencing the challenge. Identify the root cause in the fourth column. (Refer to the Equity and Access Audit and Root Cause Template)

#### **Resources:**

- PA Essential Practices Toolkit
- Equity and Access Audit (Appendix A)
- Prioritization Matrix
- Root Cause Template (Appendix B)

#### **Guiding Questions for Schools:**

##### *Preparing for the needs assessment:*

- What data will allow us to assess student academic achievement, student engagement in school and readiness to learn, instructional quality, and school climate?
- Who will be responsible for collecting and organizing the data for the committee to use in the needs assessment?
- Do we need support facilitating a comprehensive needs assessment?

##### *Conducting the needs assessment:*

- How do student outcomes compare to identified performance goals?
- Are there inequities in student resources and outcomes among student groups within the school?
- Are students engaged in school and ready to learn?
- At what level are we currently implementing the PA Essential Practices for Schools and their Communities?

##### *Selecting priorities for improvement:*

- Which 2-3 essential practices (and student nonacademic support needs), if addressed, will have the greatest potential for impact on student outcomes?

##### *Conducting the root cause analysis:*

- 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 this practice or improve student engagement and readiness to learn?

## D. Priority Statements and Aligned Outcomes

Based on your prioritized challenges, develop, in specific detail, two to three high-leverage priority statements to focus your improvement plan. In drafting priority statements, your team will turn each prioritized challenge into an actionable statement that explains how the school plans to address the primary root cause of the challenge.

### Steps to Complete Section II.D.:

1. For each prioritized challenge, write a priority statement to restate the primary root cause as an actionable statement.
2. For each priority statement, include a clear compelling rationale that articulates why the priority needs urgent attention in order to achieve the school's vision (i.e., the gap between what is currently occurring in the school and what the vision says should be occurring).
3. Align each priority statement to the established PDE Outcome Categories listed in the drop-down menu under "Outcome Category" by selecting the category that is best aligned to the priority statement. If a priority statement is related to more than one outcome category, pick the one that is the most direct or primary outcome that will be impacted by addressing the priority.

### Guiding Questions for Schools:

- For each prioritized challenge, what is the primary root cause?
- What needs to change in order for us to resolve the primary root cause?
  - What practice, structure, or system do we need to change to better support educators, students, parents/guardians, or our community?
  - What makes us think that changing in these ways will improve our progress toward achieving our vision and long-term goals?

### *Indicators of Exemplary Planning:*

***Timely and meaningful consultation with stakeholders:*** The 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.

***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).

***Root causes:*** The plan uses a diverse array of appropriate data sources and evidence to articulate, in specific detail, the root causes for each prioritized challenge 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.

***Priority statements and aligned outcomes:*** The plan lists, in specific detail, two to three high-leverage priority statements that will be the focus for the plan's designated time period. A clear, compelling rationale is provided for each priority statement 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).

### III. Measurable Goal Statements

An important step in the planning process is to establish clear, measurable goals for each priority that will allow the school to track whether you are on track to improving the prioritized challenge areas. These measurable goal statements serve as leading indicators that provide early evidence that can be used to gauge whether a school is on track to improve and to guide mid-course corrections that can increase the success of improvement efforts. The measurable goals and quarterly benchmarks should be well-defined, measurable and represent significant gains for your teachers, students, or other stakeholders. All members of your staff should be able to readily recite the goals in the plan.

#### Steps to Complete Section III.:

1. For each priority statement, develop one or two measurable annual goals.
2. For each annual goal, develop quarterly benchmarks that can be measured and reviewed throughout the year.  
*Quarterly benchmarks should be back-mapped from the annual measurable goal.*

Each measurable goal and quarterly benchmark should demonstrate each of the following:

- **Specific:** Clearly defined, straightforward, and easily generated without complex calculations
- **Measurable:** Easy to measure using agreed-upon methods, and benchmarked against reliable data
- **Attainable:** Represents transformative change in the school, but reflective of what has been (can be) achieved with hard work
- **Relevant:** Connected to the priorities of you plan and reflective of the needs of students in the school
- **Time-bound:** Given a clear deadline, and able to be measured at a frequency that will allow for problem-solving.

#### Guiding Questions for Schools:

##### Annual goals:

- How can the success in each priority area be measured?
- If we change in the ways we said we are going to do, how will we know?
- How will this priority statement impact adult beliefs, knowledge, practices, or behaviors?
- How will the priority statement impact the quality of materials used in educational or support programs?
- How will the priority statement impact student beliefs, behavior, or learning?

##### Quarterly benchmarks:

- In order to achieve our annual measurable goal, where do we need to be three months from now, six months from now, and nine months from now?

#### *Indicator of Exemplary Planning:*

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 toward the school's vision.

## IV. Action Plans

### A. Evidence-Based Strategies

ESSA requires that every school support and improvement plan “includes evidence-based strategies, interventions, or activities” [ESSA §§ 1111(d)(1)(B)(ii) (CSI) and 1111(d)(2)(B)(ii) (TSI)]. If the school receives federal school improvement funds (via the state’s 7% set aside of 1003 funds; i.e., CSI schools), then the required intervention in a school’s plan must be supported by the top three levels of evidence [ESSA § 8101(21)(B)].

Once priorities for improvement have been identified, the school improvement committee (in consultation with other stakeholders) will determine the strategies that will best address these priorities. By using rigorous and relevant evidence and assessing the local capacity to implement the strategy (e.g., funding, staff, staff skills, stakeholder support), schools are more likely to implement interventions successfully.

#### Steps to Complete Section IV.A.:

1. For each priority statement and measurable goal, identify an evidence-based strategy that is best fit for the challenge area and your school context.
2. List the selected evidence-based strategy in the right column of the table in the planning template. (See *Evidence Resource Center for strategies that meet ESSA’s tiers of evidence*)

#### Resource:

- Evidence Resource Center

#### Guiding Questions for Schools:

- For a given priority statement and measurable goal, are there any strategies supported by strong evidence or moderate evidence?
- If strong evidence or moderate evidence is not available, is there promising evidence?
- Were studies conducted in settings and with populations relevant to our local context or prioritized student groups (e.g., students with disabilities, English Learners)?
- What resources are required to implement this strategy?
- Will the potential impact of this strategy justify the costs, or are there more cost-effective strategies that will accomplish the same outcomes?
- What is the local capacity to implement this strategy? Are there available funds? Do staff have the needed skills? Is there collective buy-in for the strategy?
- How does this strategy fit into our vision and other existing efforts?
- How will this strategy be sustained over time?
- If we implement the evidence-based strategy with fidelity, what outcome area will be most significantly and directly impacted?

## B. Action Plans

The next step in the planning process is to address how you are planning to implement each evidence-based strategy. In other words, you know what you are trying to do; now what specific steps are required to prepare and implement the strategy with fidelity? Using the Action Plan template in the planning document, create a comprehensive implementation plan for each evidence-based strategy.

### Steps to Complete Section IV.B.:

For each evidence-based strategy:

1. **Action Steps:** Identify the discrete action steps required to prepare for and implement the strategy in sequential order.
2. **Materials/Resources/Supports Needed:** List any materials, resources, or support the school requires from the LEA or external partner to implement the strategy (in addition to those that will be procured as part of the school's implementation of the plan.
3. **Persons/Positions Responsible:** List the person(s) responsible for ensuring the action step is implemented with fidelity.
4. **Implementation Timeline:** List the start and completion dates for the action step.
5. **Anticipated Outputs:** List 2-3 tangible products or observable events/shifts in practice that will help the school assess whether you are implementing the action plan with fidelity.
6. **Monitoring/Evaluation Plan:** Describe the monitoring routines the school will implement to assess progress in implementing the action plans as designed, as well as leading indicators of impact of implementation. Include a description of the people who will be involved in the monitoring routines, the data that will be used, and any tools that will be used in these routines.
7. **Expenditures:** For any strategy that requires funding, describe how funding will be used to implement the action plan. Include a brief, but clear description of each expenditure, funding source (Title 1, General fund, IDEA, etc.), and cost for each expenditure.
8. **Professional Learning Plan:** If a strategy for the measurable goal statement to which it is attached requires professional learning activities, develop a Professional Learning Plan. *(Two templates are provided in case two professional learning goals are required for an Action Plan)*

#### Resource:

- Evidence Resource Center

### Guiding Questions for Schools:

- What discrete action steps need to happen for us to implement the selected strategy with fidelity?
  - Do we need to hire staff, or create materials, facilitate an orientation session, or provide stakeholders with professional learning before we can begin implementing the strategy?
- What flexibility/autonomy, staff, time, materials are needed for successful implementation that cannot be secured using the school's available resources?
- Who is responsible for ensuring that the action step occurs?
- When are we getting started? When do we anticipate completion of each step?
- What 2-3 milestones can we measure to assess fidelity of implementation of the evidence-based strategy?
  - What do we expect to accomplish as we implement each action step?
  - How will we know the action steps are being implemented according to plan?
- What routines will we implement to monitor the implementation and impact of the action plan?
  - How will we track impact on staff? How will we track impact on student outcomes?
  - Who will be responsible for facilitating the monitoring and evaluation routines?
  - How often will we engage in monitoring and evaluation routines?
  - Who will be engaged in the monitoring and evaluation routines?
- What will it cost to implement this strategy and what funding source(s) will support the cost?
- What professional learning is needed for successful implementation?

## Steps to Complete Section IV.B. (continued):

For each professional learning plan include the following:

- a. **Goal statement:** Provide a general description of learning outcome for the professional learning activities.
- b. **Audience:** List the stakeholder group(s) who will engage in the professional learning.
- c. **Topics to be Included:** List the content on which the professional learning will focus to build capacity for participants to implement the evidence-based strategy.
- d. **Evidence of Learning:** Identify the tangible ways that participants will be expected to demonstrate their learning in their daily practice.
- e. **Anticipated Timeframe:** Identify the start and end dates for each professional learning activity.
- f. **Lead Person/Organization:** List the person or organization that will provide the professional learning.

## Guiding Questions for Schools:

- What is the goal of the professional learning activities? How will engagement in the professional learning activities impact beliefs, knowledge, or practice?
- For whom is the professional learning plan being implemented?
- On what content or practice will the professional learning series focus?
- How will you know if the professional learning activities were successful?
- How will participants demonstrate their learning during and after the professional learning activities?
- When will the professional learning activities be implemented?
- Who is responsible for coordinating or facilitating the professional learning activities?
- Do we need to secure support from an external partner to facilitate the professional learning activities?

### *Indicators of Exemplary Planning:*

**Action steps:** The plan includes a comprehensive series of 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 achieve the respective goal statements.

**Materials/resources/supports needed:** The plan identifies supports required from the LEA or external partner that align with and help implement the action steps.

**Persons/positions 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.

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

**Anticipated outputs:** For each strategy, the plan includes an array of specific indicators that serve as incremental checkpoints to measure the school's current progress in implementing the action plan with fidelity. All indicators are meaningfully and intentionally aligned with the overarching goals of the strategy.

**Monitoring/evaluation plan:** Self-assessment and reflection practices are meaningfully incorporated into the school's routines.

**Expenditures:** School level expenditures are reasonable and necessary to achieve the vision and goals for improvement. The school and LEA leveraged multiple sources of funding to ensure the school is sufficiently resourced to implement the strategies outlined in their action plan.

**Professional learning plan:** 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, with specific expectations for and measures of participant learning.

## V. Communications Plan for School Improvement

*“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 a diversity of 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”* ([CCSSO and Partners for Each and Every Child, 2018](#)).

In this section, you will develop a strategy for continued engagement of stakeholders in the improvement process.

### Steps to Complete Section V.:

1. **Communication Strategies:** List the communication activities you will implement during the next year related to your improvement plan.
2. **Audience:** For each communication activity, identify the intended audience of the communication.
3. **Topics:** For each communication activity, identify
4. **Anticipated timeline:** For each communication activity, identify the anticipated start and end date for the activity.

### Guiding Questions for Schools:

- How are we going to share our plan with staff, parents, and our broader community?
- What is the purpose of each communication activity?
  - Are we seeking feedback, commitment to implementation, problem-solving a challenge, etc.?
  - To achieve the purpose, what topics must we address in the communication activity?
- How are we going to report out our milestones/success to our staff, parents, LEA, and broader community?