EVIDENCE-BASED IMPROVEMENT

A Guide for States to Strengthen Their Frameworks and Supports Aligned to the Evidence Requirements of ESSA

TOOL 2:   
LEA INVENTORY OF CURRENT PRACTICE

Sylvie Hale   
Lenay Dunn   
Nikola Filby   
John Rice   
Lori Van Houten



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## Feedback

We welcome your feedback. This tool and the related guide are a first generation set of materials to help states and districts implement ESSA; we hope to revise and improve them based on use in the field. Suggestions of other resources are welcome, as are requests to develop new tools to fill gaps in the field. Access the full guide at: [http://www.wested.org/resources/evidence-based-improvement-essa-guide-for-states](http://www.wested.org/resources/evidence-based-improvement-essa-guide-for-states%20)

## Contact Information

Nikola Filby

415.615.3124

[nfilby@WestEd.org](mailto:nfilby@WestEd.org)

Sylvie Hale

415.615.3188

[shale@WestEd.org](mailto:shale@WestEd.org)

# **Tool 2:** LEA Inventory of Current Practice

### Purpose

To help local education agency (LEA) staff members be explicit about the LEA’s process for engaging with its schools in evidence-based improvement planning and decision-making, and the support the LEA provides for effective use of the process; identify gaps or needed changes to strengthen the LEA’s model or framework; and prioritize next steps.

### Outcome

The discussions prompted by this tool will lead to a plan of action to address gaps and ensure the LEA’s process is evidence-based and is aligned with ESSA requirements and with the state’s process. The completed tool will also serve as an artifact of discussions and decisions.

### Materials

In preparation, gather guides, graphics, and other documentation that describe and provide support for your district’s processes for improvement planning, monitoring, decision-making, and related activities.

### Who Should Be Involved

Staff who oversee the district’s improvement efforts should be involved in working through this tool. Those involved should have substantive knowledge of the relevant federal programs and requirements. Participants may include multiple staff from one program or department, or, ideally, staff from multiple programs and offices, in order to support alignment across the LEA.

### Time

Set aside 1–2 hours for each step, or longer (3 or more hours) if multiple programs or departments are working together. This time can be spaced out over several weeks, with breaks between steps to reflect or to gather additional information to inform the subsequent step(s).

### Instructions Overview (detailed instructions are provided with each step)

* Step 1: Get organized, including identifying roles and responsibilities, gathering materials, establishing a schedule, and reviewing documentation.
* Step 2: Describe the context of your LEA’s process for engaging with schools in evidence-based improvement planning and decision-making, and for providing support to the schools in this process.
* Step 3: Map the steps of your improvement process to the steps of the recommended process (described in section 2 of this guide) and identify any gaps or needed changes in order for your district’s process to incorporate the elements of the recommended process.
* Step 4: Identify the supports offered to schools (e.g., webinar, guidebook, training, side-by-side coaching, regional forums); the timing or sequence (e.g., specific dates or times of the year, such as fall or spring); and any gaps or needed changes (e.g., redundancies, timing issues, lack of resources) in order for your district’s process to incorporate the elements of the recommended process.
* Step 5: Review your inventory of current practice (steps 2–4), select priority areas to address, and describe next steps. Develop an action plan.

### Leading the Conversation

* One outcome of this conversation is to build a common understanding of an evidence-based framework that will drive improvement work. Especially in steps 2, 3, and 4, be aware that participants will likely have different backgrounds and experiences through which they view the framework and how it is implemented. While participants may seem to agree, it will be important to regularly check for understanding. Ask participants to repeat what they heard. Paraphrase contributions to ensure that your understanding is accurate. Encourage participant questions.
* For step 3, consider having copies of the continuous improvement framework from section 2 of this guide, including the descriptions of each element of the process, available. Being able to compare the district’s recommended framework with this guide’s framework will inform the conversation about alignment and possible gaps.

### Modifications or Variations

* For step 3, consider using this tool in two phases. In the first phase, focus exclusively on your LEA framework for improvement planning and on identifying strengths and areas for needed adjustments. In the second phase, revisit your framework and delve deeper into how the use of evidence and data is infused throughout. Is this use of evidence an explicit activity such as requiring certain data in a needs assessment or requiring an evidence base for interventions? Are relevant data readily available? Are there adequate supports built in? You might consider modifying the provided table by adding a column to capture details about the use of evidence or data.

STEP 1: Get Organized

Take time to get organized and build your knowledge base by gathering necessary materials and building a well-informed team to complete subsequent steps. Things to consider:

**Who is involved?** Identify which departments or programs should be represented; then identify the individuals who will participate in this work. What are their respective roles and responsibilities in the group (e.g., note taker, facilitator)?

| Department or Program | Name | Contact Information | Role/Responsibility |
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**What do we need to know?** Gather and organize documents and other materials that describe the planning and related support processes to schools in your district. Consider the value of having graphics or models from sources other than your own department or program. Review documentation and ensure that all participants have strong foundational knowledge of the information. Does everyone have a common understanding of the subject matter (e.g., SEA and LEA improvement frameworks, ESSA requirements, evidence-based interventions)?

|  |  |
| --- | --- |
| Document or Material  (title, description, source) | Why It Is Important  (what everyone should know) |
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**Attend to logistics**. What will the meeting schedule be? Where will you meet? What materials do you need (e.g., chart paper, sticky notes)?

Notes

STEP 2: Describe Context

Briefly describe the context of your process for engaging with schools in evidence-based improvement planning and decision-making, and for providing support to schools. Questions to consider:

* What model or framework have you defined that guides this work with schools?
* What services, resources, or other supports are you required to provide to schools (e.g., based on funding or other programmatic requirements)?
* How is evidence-based decision-making part of this process? Where does it fit in?
* What is produced as a result of going through the improvement planning process?

Briefly Describe Your Improvement Planning and Decision-making Processes

STEP 3: Map Current Process

The first column of the table below outlines the five steps of a recommended evidence-based improvement process, including key decision-making elements (full descriptions of each step are provided in section 2 of this guide). In the second column, map the steps in your district’s improvement process for schools to steps in the recommended process. Be sure to include how each step uses evidence. Note that there may be more than one step in your process for each step in the recommended process (e.g., the Inform step of the recommended process might include both “Needs Assessment” and “Goal Development” from your district’s process). In the third column, identify any gaps or needed changes in order for your district’s process to incorporate the elements of the recommended process. Questions to consider:

* Does your district’s process address all of the steps in the recommended process? If not, what are the gaps?
* Does your district’s process address all of the steps in your state’s process, if applicable? If not, what are the gaps?
* How is the use of research or data integral to each step of the continuous improvement process? That is, how is each step designed so that it must be successfully completed by incorporating research or data?

| **Continuous Improvement Steps** | **Your Improvement Process Steps** | **Gaps or Possible Changes** |
| --- | --- | --- |
| **Inform:** Analyze local needs; adjust focus. |  |  |
| **Select:** Identify, examine, and select evidence-based interventions. |  |  |
| **Plan:** Develop implementation strategies, adjust for local context. |  |  |
| **Implement:** Proceed with improvement interventions; make formative adjustments. |  |  |
| **Analyze:** Conduct summative assessment of performance and effectiveness. |  |  |

* How does your model reinforce a continuous (cyclical) process?

STEP 4: Identify Current Supports

In the table below, identify the supports that your LEA offers (e.g., webinar, guidebook, training, side-by-side coaching, regional forums) to build school capacity in each of the five steps of a continuous improvement process. List the supports in chronological or sequential order and indicate which of the steps each support relates to. Include any supports provided by the state or by intermediary organizations. In the last column, indicate whether the resource supports or incorporates the use of evidence or data to inform decisions. After filling in the table, review what you have listed and identify gaps or needed changes (e.g., redundancies, timing issues, lack of resources). Questions to consider:

* Do the supports that you provide address all of the steps? Is the timing or sequence appropriate?
* How do your supports leverage state supports?
* Are the supports strong enough to allow schools to navigate the process independently, or is additional direct support from the district or from intermediaries still required?
* How effective are the supports, and what seems to make them effective? How do you know?
* Does everyone who needs support receive it?
* Are there adequate supports for the use of evidence or data to inform decisions?

| Timing or Sequence | Specific Support Provided | Inform | Select | Plan | Implement | Analyze | Evidence? |
| --- | --- | --- | --- | --- | --- | --- | --- |
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Gaps or Needed Changes

STEP 5: Identify Priorities and Next Steps

Review the results of your inventory of current practice (steps 2–4), select priority areas to address, and describe next steps, including action items, persons responsible, and due dates. Questions to consider:

* What changes in the structure of your evidence-based continuous improvement process need to be made in order to include each step of the recommended continuous improvement process (or, alternatively, align with the state’s process), and to incorporate research or data throughout the process? (See the results capture in the step 3 chart.)
* What can you change, add, or remove in order to have the biggest impact?
* What changes in support might be most beneficial? (See the step 4 chart.)
* What resources (time, funding, personnel) will you need?
* How will you communicate any changes to others in the district, to support providers (e.g., intermediaries, state support providers), and to schools?

Priority Areas to Address

Next Steps