

A Guide to District Support for School Planning Summer 2025

School planning can be a first step to successful improvement work in schools. The extent to which districts support the school planning process is a district-level decision. However, districts do have the responsibility each year of reviewing and approving school-level plans. Below is a list of strategies districts may use to support the school planning process.

Set Expectations with School Leaders and Approvers

As districts prepare for supporting school planning, leaders should consider the specific expectations they want to establish as a district, as well as how they will communicate those expectations. This document provides some considerations for setting district expectations for school planning.

Timeline

When should the team start working on the plan?

Who should they engage in its creation?

When will the first draft need to be submitted?

When will they receive the first round of feedback?

What trainings or supports will be provided and when?

What are the district's expectations for revisions or monitoring throughout the year?

Review sample support timelines [here](#).

Quality

How will the district define a quality plan?

What tools or resources will the district provide to planners and reviewers to promote quality?

Look at the school planning rubric [here](#).

How might the district adapt this rubric to match the district's expectations for school level plans?

Considering that schools inherit district goals and strategies, and their plans should be in alignment with the district's plan for improvement, what specific expectations does the district have for school plans?

- Which goals and strategies (theories of action) should remain tightly aligned to the district plan but tailored to the school context?
- What connections to initiatives or legislation are expected? (e.g., summer programming, Tutoring, Math HQIM, ELA HQIM, high quality instructionally appropriate IEPs)
- Are there any additional expectations for any schools identified as ATSI/TSI/CSI? How will the district ensure that these schools are meeting the needs of the student groups for which they have been identified?

Provide Training and Support to School Leaders

One way districts can support quality planning is by providing school leaders and approvers with training and support during the planning process. Below are some resources district leaders can use to provide training on improvement planning to school leaders.

- [Aligning District and School Plans](#): This slide deck can be customized by district leaders to communicate their theory of action and include the expectations for quality that its leadership team has defined in order to support school leaders or the school planning team in creating a high-quality improvement plan. Additional tools have been linked below and throughout the slide deck:
 - [Theory of Action Template](#)
 - [Data Review Template](#)
 - [Analyzing Data](#)
 - [Prioritizing Needs Activities](#)
 - [Action Steps Tool](#)
 - [Aligning Goals and Strategies Tool](#)

Additionally, another way districts can support quality school-level planning is by providing school leaders with front-end support throughout the planning window. Some considerations for support are as follows:

- Set aside one planned check-in for each school during the school planning window and set expectations for where the schools should be in the planning process at time of check-in. (ex. needs assessment and goals complete)
- Assign reviewers to specific schools and have them provide ongoing support throughout the school planning window.
- Prioritize support for schools with new leaders and schedule two check-ins during the planning window with set expectations for where schools should be in the planning process at each check-in.
- Set a date prior to the official school due date to have school plans ready but not submitted. Reviewers could conduct a pre-review with feedback for all schools or a set of prioritized schools.

Establish Routine Check-ins and Monitoring of the School Plans

School improvement plans are only as helpful as they are living and breathing documents that guide the work and reflection of school leaders. Districts may consider implementing check-in structures and protocols that focus on progress towards the school plan. Below are some resources district leaders can use to establish routine check-ins, as well as some protocols they might use to facilitate those meetings.

- [Roles and Responsibilities Template](#): This template will help the school team identify who needs to be involved in a strong reflection on school plan implementation during the school year. Using the template will help teams identify the roles for each team member at the reflection meetings.
- [Scheduling Template for School Plan Check-ins](#): This template can be adapted and used to schedule check-ins across the school year and to house notes on the reflections that occurred in each meeting.
- [After Action Review Protocol](#): This protocol can be used to facilitate check-in meetings on progress towards school level goals.
- [District Level Reflection Protocol](#): This protocol can be used by district leaders to reflect on the check-in meetings and progress of schools to determine next steps for district level support or intervention.

Provide Training and Support to Plan Approvers

Another way districts can support quality planning is by providing plan approvers with training and support during the planning and review process. Below are some guiding questions to consider when planning for review and a resource that can be used to set expectations and norming for review of school plans.

Reviewers

Who will review the plans?

What should feedback look and sound like? What tools should reviewers use for providing feedback?

When should the first round of feedback be complete?

When should the final reviews be complete?

Approval

Who will approve the final plans?

What is the process for submitting for final approval?

When should plans be submitted for final approval?

[Preparing to Support and Give Feedback on School Plans](#): This slide deck can be customized by district leaders to include the expectations for support and feedback that its leadership team has defined in order to appropriately support school leaders throughout the planning and review process.