



Collaborative Teams Toolkit

Tools to support collaborative team structures
and evidence-based conversations in schools

Office of Evaluation
Fall 2015



State of New Jersey
Department of Education

New

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Part 1: Introduction

About this Toolkit

The Collaborative Teams Toolkit is intended to help schools establish productive collaborative teams of teachers and administrators working and learning together to help their students. This toolkit focuses on supporting the monitoring of Student Growth Objectives (SGOs) and other student data by providing the necessary tools to promote the environment for having successful evidence-based conversations. This toolkit is built following [New Jersey's Standards for Professional Learning](#). Please visit the [AchieveNJ website](#) for updates to this resource, as well as other tools and resources to support SGO implementation and many other elements of AchieveNJ.

Three New Jersey school districts collaborated with the New Jersey Department of Education (“the Department”) and the United States Department of Education (USED) in the creation of this toolkit. Over the course of spring 2015, teachers, principals, central office staff, and superintendents from these three districts met together virtually and in person to discuss SGOs and collaborative teaming in their districts, what they have tried, and what has been effective. The Department’s Office of Evaluation looked nationally at best practices in both developing and supporting collaborative teams and with feedback from the three districts, compiled the resources, and developed new tools that comprise the current toolkit. In addition, the Department sought feedback and insights from the AchieveNJ Advisory Committee. Every piece has been thought through by New Jersey educators, with New Jersey educators in mind.

The Tools

Acknowledging that schools will be at many different starting points for this work, the tools span all levels of needs and are divided into two types. The first set, [Foundational Level: "Establishing and Supporting Collaborative Teams"](#) contains foundational level tools and resources aimed at laying the groundwork for successful collaborative teams. The second set, [Advanced Level: "Taking Collaborative Teams to the Next Level: Alignment, Integration, and Relevance"](#) are more advanced and are designed to help schools consistently engage in the most productive evidence-based conversations. Each set of tools links to various other documents and resources to help you along the path of sustaining high functioning teams in your school or district. The chart lists the content within the kit.

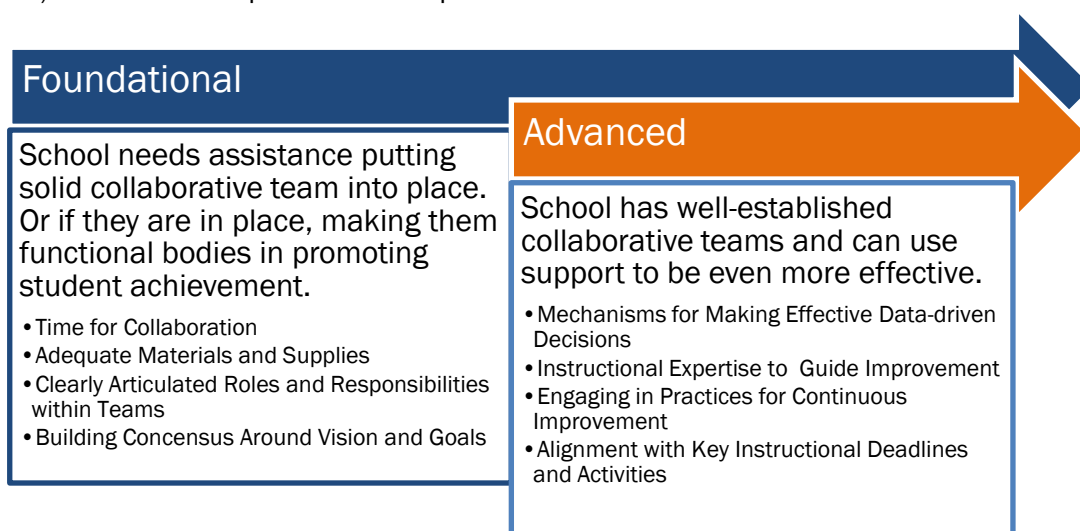
| Collaborative Teams Toolkit | |
|---|---|
| Foundational Level: Establishing and Supporting Collaborative Teams | Advanced Level: Alignment, Integration, and Relevance |
| <ol style="list-style-type: none">1. Self-Assessment2. Time for Collaboration3. Adequate Materials and Supplies4. Clearly Articulated Roles and Responsibilities5. Building Consensus Around Vision and Goals | <ol style="list-style-type: none">1. Self-Assessment2. Mechanisms in Place for Making Effective Data-Driven Decisions3. Instructional Expertise to Guide Improvement4. Engaging in Practices for Continuous Improvement5. Alignment with Key Instructional Deadlines and Activities |

How to Use this Toolkit

Schools can begin using this toolkit by completing the [self-assessment](#), found on page 6. This should be completed by a school principal or other district leader along with a school leadership team (such as the [School Improvement Panel](#)) and can be an integral part of a school or district level [professional development plan](#). The self-assessment will help in identifying strengths and areas of growth. Below each component is a resource section with links to various materials and tools to help guide you through the steps in meeting your goal(s). Each of these links is accompanied by a brief description of the resource. These will guide you towards strengthening that individual area of the collaborative team process. Steps for completing the self-assessment are listed below.

Note: The associated tools contained within the guidebook are intended to support schools along a continuum of collaborative team implementation, and are intended to be flexible and adaptable to your individual school and staff's needs. There is no one perfect order, and, depending on your specific context, only parts of an individual tool or activity will be relevant to your school or your team.

Whether you are in the early stages of this work or in need of improvement (foundational), or have established teams ready to go to the next level (advanced), certain items must be present to work effectively. The following chart describes the typical school as it moves across the continuum of foundational level teams through advanced. The different levels of implementation (foundational and advanced) and their descriptions and components are listed below.



Foundational level tools largely address structures for putting the proper foundations in place for collaborative teams to exist and function.

- 1.1: Time for Collaboration: *tools and resources for making the most of your schedule for collaborative team structures*
- 1.2: Adequate Materials and Supplies: *tools and resources checklist to supplement collaborative teamwork (including having access to proper data)*
- 1.3: Clearly Articulated Roles and Responsibilities: *tools and resources for assigning roles, facilitating meetings, and setting protocols for doing collaborative work*
- 1.4: Building Consensus Around Vision and Goals: *tools and resources for forming norms and protocols around the group's vision and outcomes.*

Advanced level tools are meant for well-established collaborative team structures looking to have more advanced evidence-based conversations.

- 2.1: Mechanisms for Making Effective Data-Driven Decisions: *tools and resources to assist in advanced decision-making protocols and data-driven decisions*
- 2.2: Instructional Expertise to Guide Improvement: *tools and resources to assist in leaders and teachers in assessment literacy, evidence-based conversations, and developing Student Growth Objectives*
- 2.3: Engaging in Practices for Continuous Improvement: *tools and resources to assist in having evidence-based conversations and in maintaining continuous, ongoing cycles of improvement*
- 2.4: Alignment with Key Instructional Deadlines and Activities: *higher level district resources for planning out a yearly calendar as well as integrating both mandatory and discretionary initiatives*

Part 2: The Self-Assessment

The following are *suggested steps* for one way to complete this self-assessment. Depending on your school/district size, leadership team, etc. this process should be modified to meet your individual needs.

- **Step 1:** Principal reviews the document for scope and relevance to the school and identifies who should complete the self-assessment. The School Improvement Panel (ScIP) or other leadership team should lead the process (if the ScIP includes only one teacher, schools should consider consulting additional teachers representing different grade levels/subject areas). The team should come to an understanding of what a “four” looks like at each level, along with any challenges or impediments that might exist for the school to reach that level.
- **Step 2:** Complete the self-assessment, examining your school’s strengths and possible areas of growth. Compare scores, discussing any significant differences which may exist. Decide if additional feedback from teachers or other building staff might add value.
- **Step 3:** Decide which components are most relevant to the school’s particular goals. Narrow down the area(s) for focus for the current (or upcoming) school year. Share results of the self-assessment and discuss any differences in perspectives between team and leadership team.
- **Step 4:** Define next action steps required to implement your school’s goals. Beginning with the end in mind, discuss what people think it would take to accomplish your goals (including perceived challenges or impediments). Identify next steps and create an action plan to build capacity along selected domains and components of the self-assessment tool. Communicate to all staff about the priorities and work that the school will undertake to launch, expand, or strengthen collaborative teams for the current and/or upcoming school year.

The Self-Assessment

| 1. FOUNDATIONAL LEVEL: ESTABLISHING AND SUPPORTING COLLABORATIVE TEAMS | | | | |
|---|---|--|--|--------|
| 1.1 Time for Collaboration | | | | |
| 4 | 3 | 2 | 1 | RATING |
| Staff have regular collaborative planning time <i>daily or weekly, built in as part of the school schedule.</i> | Staff have collaborative planning time <i>occasionally (monthly or less) over the course of the school year.</i> | Staff have collaborative planning time <i>infrequently (PD days) or outside of the school day.</i> | Staff <i>do not have collaborative planning time.</i> | |
| <p>Resources See Section 1.1: Scheduling Collaborative Team Time at Your School</p> <p>Next Steps</p> | | | | |
| 1.2 Adequate Materials and Resources (content standards, curriculum resources, assessment materials, meeting space, etc.). | | | | |
| 4 | 3 | 2 | 1 | RATING |
| Collaborative teams have access to <i>all necessary materials and resources.</i> | Collaborative teams have access to <i>some materials and/or resources and know how to request additional from the school.</i> | Collaborative teams have access to <i>some materials and/or resources but do not have a way to request additional from the school.</i> | Collaborative teams <i>do not have access to any necessary materials or resources.</i> | |
| <p>Resources In addition to Section 1.2, see: Common Core State Standards NJ Core Curriculum Content Standards Partnership for the Assessment of Readiness for College and Career (PARCC) AchieveNJ NJ Model Curriculum <u>Your school's curriculum and curricular resources</u></p> <p>Next Steps</p> | | | | |

| 1.3 Clearly Articulated Roles and Responsibilities (team leader, facilitator, note-taker) Within Teams | | | | |
|--|--|---|---|--------|
| 4 | 3 | 2 | 1 | RATING |
| Collaborative teams have a <i>clearly established structure with defined functions, and staff play these roles effectively.</i> | Collaborative teams have a <i>clearly established structure with defined functions, but staff does not participate and/or fulfill these roles consistently.</i> | Collaborative team members have <i>informal roles and expectations are unclear for how staff should participate or fulfill these roles.</i> | Collaborative team members <i>do not have clearly defined roles.</i> | |
| Resources See Section 1.3 Next Steps | | | | |
| 1.4 Building Consensus Around Vision and Goals | | | | |
| 4 | 3 | 2 | 1 | RATING |
| <i>All participating staff have a shared vision for how collaboration supports improved instructional practice and can articulate a set of clear learning goals that will help them achieve this vision.</i> | <i>Most participating staff have a shared vision for how collaboration supports improved instructional practice but less can articulate a set of clear learning goals that will help them achieve this vision.</i> | <i>Less than half of participating staff have a shared vision of how collaboration supports improved instructional practice, and there is little consensus around how this vision translates into learning goals.</i> | <i>There is little to no shared vision of how collaboration supports improved instructional practice.</i> | |
| Resources See Section 1.4 Next Steps | | | | |

| 2. ADVANCED LEVEL: ALIGNMENT, INTEGRATION AND RELEVANCE | | | | |
|---|---|--|--|--------|
| 2.1 Mechanisms in Place for Making Effective Data-driven Decisions | | | | |
| 4 | 3 | 2 | 1 | RATING |
| Teams have <i>necessary competencies and tools for leading productive meetings and facilitating effective data-driven discussions</i> that result in clear actions for improvement. | Teams have <i>some competencies and tools for leading productive meetings and facilitating effective data-driven discussions</i> that result in clear actions for improvement, but <i>require additional training</i> . | Teams have <i>received guidance for facilitating effective data-driven discussions but require additional guidance/tools</i> in implementation. | Teams are <i>not knowledgeable or prepared</i> for facilitating effective data-driven discussions. | |
| Resources See Section 2.1 | | | | |
| Next Steps | | | | |
| 2.2 Instructional Expertise to Guide Improvement (i.e. experts within the school community who can help unpack the standards; subject area specialists to deepen content knowledge; and assessment specialists to support reliability and validity) | | | | |
| 4 | 3 | 2 | 1 | RATING |
| School has <i>dedicated instructional expertise</i> to guide teams in developing improvement strategies for students, including <i>assessment specialists</i> who can help teachers create high-quality SGO assessments. | School has <i>some instructional expertise</i> on staff to guide teams in developing improvement strategies for students and who can provide <i>some assistance</i> to teachers in creating high-quality SGO assessments. | School has <i>limited instructional expertise</i> to guide teams in developing improvement strategies for students, with <i>limited resources for providing assistance</i> to teachers in developing high-quality SGO assessments. | School has <i>no dedicated instructional expertise</i> to guide teams in developing improvement strategies for students or to help teachers design high-quality SGO assessments. | |
| Resources In addition to Section 2.2 , see: Assessment Design Module Assessment Design Toolkit SGO 2.1 Training and Guidebook | | | | |
| Next Steps | | | | |

| 2.3 Engaging in Practices for Continuous Improvement (gathering evidence of current levels of student learning; developing strategies and ideas to build on strengths and address weaknesses in that learning; implementing those strategies and ideas; analyzing the impact of the changes to discover what was effective; applying new knowledge in the next cycle of continuous improvement) | | | | |
|---|--|--|---|--------|
| 4 | 3 | 2 | 1 | RATING |
| Teams <i>regularly review and analyze student data from multiple sources</i> (daily, weekly, monthly) to drive targeted improvements in instructional practice on an individual basis and school-wide and are <i>always engaged</i> in the process of continuous improvement. | Teams <i>infrequently review and analyze student data from multiple sources</i> (less than monthly) but still attempt to use what they have to drive improvements in practice and are <i>sometimes engaged</i> in the process of continuous improvement. | Teams <i>rarely or inconsistently review or analyze student data</i> , employing it on a summative basis (looking backwards) rather than formative, and are <i>working towards</i> a process for continuous improvement. | Teams <i>do not review or analyze student data at all</i> and are <i>rarely engaged</i> in a process of continuous improvement. | |
| Resources In addition to Section 2.3 , see: SGO 2.1 Training and Guidebook | | | | |
| Next Steps | | | | |
| 2.4 Alignment with Key Instructional Deadlines and Activities | | | | |
| 4 | 3 | 2 | 1 | RATING |
| Content, data analysis, and improvement discussions in team meetings are <i>highly relevant to the instructional planning and improvement cycle for all educators</i> . | Content, data analysis, and improvement discussions in team meetings are <i>highly relevant to the instructional improvement cycle for some educators</i> (i.e. core content areas). | Content, data analysis, and improvement discussions in team meetings are <i>relevant to the instructional improvement cycle for a small group of educators</i> in the school (i.e. teachers of tested grades/subjects). | Content, data analysis, and improvement discussions in team meetings are <i>not relevant to the instructional improvement cycle for any educators</i> . | |
| Resources In addition to Section 2.4 , see: NJDOE School and Professional Development Planning Requirements and Templates | | | | |
| Next Steps | | | | |

Part 3: Foundational Level: Establishing and Supporting Collaborative Teams

This selection of tools and resources is intended to help you lay the groundwork for successful collaborative teams in your school or district. Many of these contain links to other external tools and resources which can be used for this purpose.

Strategy 1.1: Time for Collaboration

Scheduling Collaborative Team Time at Your School

If you have minimal time for teachers to meet in teams or minimal organization of what those teams look like, there are two issues that you must resolve in order to get started. This resource is designed to help you think through these two issues:

1. Organize **STAFF** into teams.
2. Find **TIME** for teams to meet and collaborate.

| STAFF | |
|--|--|
| PLANNING QUESTIONS | RESOURCES |
| <p><i>How does it make sense to organize teachers into teams at your school? By grade level, content area, or department (Approach #1)? Or, by students taught (Approach #2)?</i></p> <p><u>ADVICE:</u></p> <ul style="list-style-type: none">• Have staff plan across school teams.• Define teams by students taught or content covered. Ideally, staff will have time throughout the year to work with both horizontal and vertical teams (e.g., weekly in grade-level teams, once a month work by department). Staff can then discuss students in common and their instructional approaches.• Consider teams as student advisors, responsible for all aspects of the students' experience at your school. | <p><u>Approach #1: Grade-Level Teams or Department Teams:</u></p> <ul style="list-style-type: none">• Sample Elementary Schedules<ul style="list-style-type: none">○ Marzano Sample Schedule [PDF]○ All Things PLC Sample Schedule [PDF]• Sample Middle School Schedules<ul style="list-style-type: none">○ North Carolina Sample Schedule [PDF]○ Virginia Middle School Double Block Proposal [PDF]• Sample High School Schedules<ul style="list-style-type: none">○ North Carolina Sample Schedule [PDF]○ Piedmont High School Sample Schedule [PDF]○ Watchung Hills Sample Schedule [PDF] |
| <p><i>Which staff members do not “fit” into teams?</i></p> <p><u>ADVICE:</u></p> <ul style="list-style-type: none">• Group “singleton” teachers (one teacher of any given grade/subject, like one chorus teacher or one French teacher) with the team with whom they share common planning time, the team with whom they share students, or relevant subject areas (e.g., all world language teachers).• Singleton teachers can also be connected across schools either in person or with technology (e.g. all middle school Spanish teachers in the district). | <p><u>Approach: Teams of Specials Teachers:</u></p> <ul style="list-style-type: none">• Teams made of "specials" teachers<ul style="list-style-type: none">○ All Things PLC Guidance [PDF]○ James Madison University Elementary Guidance [PDF] |

| TIME | |
|--|--|
| PLANNING QUESTIONS | RESOURCES |
| <p><i>What common time do you have now, and is that time flexible? Do your teachers participate in any other common meetings? If so, how was time found for those meetings?</i></p> <p>ADVICE:</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> Assess your current meetings schedule and the effectiveness of those meetings honestly. Prioritize collaborative team meetings over other meetings/activities. This may mean stopping other activities or changing the way you have been operating. <ul style="list-style-type: none"> Some schools have re-purposed their faculty meeting time by eliminating agenda items that can be handled through email. Some schools have given up certain faculty activities to make time for team meetings. | <p><u>Approach: Change the Existing Schedule:</u></p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> Sample Elementary Schedules <ul style="list-style-type: none"> Marzano Sample Schedule [PDF] All Things PLC Sample Schedule [PDF] Sample Middle School Schedules <ul style="list-style-type: none"> North Carolina Sample Schedule [PDF] Virginia Middle School Double Block Proposal [PDF] Sample High School Schedules <ul style="list-style-type: none"> North Carolina Sample Schedule [PDF] Piedmont High School Sample Schedule [PDF] Watchung Hills Sample Schedule [PDF] |
| <p><i>What does your collective bargaining agreement say about time and your school day? What are the parameters you will need to work within related to time?</i></p> <p>ADVICE:</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> Clarify your understanding of where you do or do not have flexibility. Look for windows of time within and outside of your school day to facilitate time for teams. | <p><u>Approach: Flex the Schedule within Contract Parameters:</u></p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> Sample Block Schedules <ul style="list-style-type: none"> Thomas Jefferson High School Sample Schedule [PDF] Virginia Middle School Double Block Proposal [PDF] Piedmont High School Sample Schedule [PDF] Sample Rotating Drop Schedules <ul style="list-style-type: none"> Watchung Hills Sample Schedule [PDF] University of Cal Berkley Samples [PDF] Sample Schedules Using Shortened Periods and Before or After School Time <ul style="list-style-type: none"> Rockwood High School Guidance Document [PDF] Carmel High School Sample [PDF] Auburn School District Samples [PDF] |

Strategy 1.2: Adequate Materials and Supplies

The monitoring, prioritizing, and coordinating of resources is critical for educators to learn about their student's needs. This is especially critical to those who are new to a school, grade level team, supervisory role, or to teaching in general. Having access to the district's curriculum, tools to collect data, forms for turning in items such as SGOs, or any available professional development is critical to every individual educator and the team's success.

Additional Resources from Self-Assessment

- [Common Core](#): The Department's Common Core home page
- [NJ Core Curriculum Content Standards](#): New Jersey Core Curriculum Content Standards page
- [PARCC](#): New Jersey's PARCC homepage
- [AchieveNJ](#): The AchieveNJ evaluation home page
- [NJ Model Curriculum](#): The homepage of New Jersey's model curriculum
- Your school's curriculum and curricular resources**: All of your district's available resources

Strategy 1.3: Clearly Articulated Roles and Responsibilities

The Importance of Roles

Setting roles for a collaborative team can help them to run more smoothly by ensuring that certain responsibilities are taken care of by different team members. Consider the following when determining roles for collaborative teams.

1. Roles need not be the same for every team. Depending on the size, structure, and purpose of the team, different combinations of roles may be necessary, while others are not.
2. Roles should be filled by those who make the most sense for the team structure. Having an administrator or team leader facilitating a meeting could make sense for some teams, but for others it might be more efficient to have a facilitator who is not otherwise directing the work.
3. Roles can be especially important for teams that meet less often or that divide up tasks to be worked on independently.

Choosing Appropriate Roles for a Team

Common Roles and Descriptions

- Common role descriptions and introductory activities can be accessed from the following links:
 - Facilitator Role [\[PDF\]](#)
 - Team Roles and Descriptions [\[PDF\]](#)

Suggestions

- Have a conversation about the pros and cons of using different roles. Teams may want to start by using only the most critical roles – facilitator and note taker – with administrators or team leaders likely taking on the most essential roles.
- The team decides together who will take on each role.
- The team may assign more roles in order to spread out the responsibilities.
- Roles may rotate through different team members.

Strategy 1.4: Building Consensus Around Vision and Goals

Foundational Protocols and Norms for Collaborative Teams

Protocols are procedures that help teams function better and meet their goals. The toolkit divides protocols into two levels: foundational and advanced. Foundational level activities which assist in building high-functioning teams in schools can be broken down into three categories and for each of these categories, there are protocols that can help teams work well. The three categories are:

1. Getting Buy-in
2. Goal-Setting and Reflection
3. Setting Norms

The following boxes provide a description of each of these categories and protocols that can help your team complete them. *Note: Many of the categories contain multiple protocols around similar activities. Schools should only use those protocols which best match what they need to complete as well as what works best with their current reality.*

1. Getting Buy-In

Before implementing new procedures, especially in an existing team, it is important to get buy-in from all team members. The following suggestions and tools can facilitate the process by helping participants identify differences in communication styles and potential obstacles or sources of conflict. First, discuss what protocols are and why they are helpful in problem-solving. Then:

- Discuss the purpose and vision of the team;
- Involve all team members in identifying specific problems, making them easier to solve; and
- Discuss the challenges of the work and team structure that may be addressed using protocols.

Protocols for Getting Buy-in:

Zones of Comfort, Risk and Danger: Constructing Your Zone Map

Purpose

- Newly established teams - get to know one another's comfort levels for tough conversations.
- Existing team - learn about one another in the case of a poorly performing team.

Requirements

- Printed "zones of comfort" for team to write on (could be completed prior to meeting).

Compass Points: An Exercise in Understanding Preference in Group Work

Purpose

- Understand how preferred working styles may affect group work, either while setting up a new team, or to reset a team that is performing poorly.

Requirements

- A room set up with space for four teams to meet in different parts of the room.
- Printed sheets with questions to answer for all participants and/or whiteboard/chart paper space on which to write answers.

2. Goal Setting and Reflection

Successful collaborative teams are able to not only identify their goals over the course of a given school year (and beyond), they also have processes in place for reviewing and reflecting on their goals at key intervals, making necessary adjustments both in real time and in longer-term (annual/bi-annual) discussions. The resources included here provide some examples of how teams might begin to implement an effective cycle of goal-setting, monitoring and reflection.

Protocols for Goal Setting and Reflection:

Team SMART Goal Setting Plan

Purpose

- A foundational goal-setting tool used to assess the team's starting point, and given that starting point, guidance for how to set good goals and figure out how to achieve them.

Requirements

- [Sample SMART Goals](#): A sample of goals set through the process above.

Support for Advanced Goal Setting

Purpose

- A goal-setting process that uses data driven cycles to support collaborative teamwork.

Requirements

- A facilitator and team assembled to do this work.

Goal Setting Protocol

Purpose

- To be used early in the year (or at the end of the previous year) to set agendas for the year's collaborative team meetings and other goals for teaching.

Requirements

- A facilitator and team assembled to do this work.

Work Plan Tool

Purpose

- Utilizing a backwards-design process, this protocol aids in both goal-setting as well as measuring progress.

Requirements

- A team with access to relevant school and/or district data depending on the goal and progress being measured.

PLC Worksheet

Purpose

- A template to assist in planning projects related to student learning outcomes, with objectives, and how the outcomes will be measured.

Requirements

- A facilitator and team assembled to do this work.

End of Year PLC Report

Purpose

- A template for an end of year look back at projects/activities and their outcomes.

Requirements

- A facilitator and team assembled to do this work.

3. Meeting Norms

Meeting norms are a shared set of ground rules or basic codes of conduct for behavior during collaborative team sessions. In established, highly functioning teams, norms are often implicit. But particularly for newly formed or struggling teams, developing a shared set of explicit norms can increase productivity by establishing the proper tone of professionalism and collaboration.

Examples of Norms; Seven Norms of Collaboration

Purpose

- These documents contain examples of norms that can be adopted as-is or modified.

Requirements

- An agreement among team members to choose their norms of behavior and an agreement to abide by them.

Forming Ground Rules

Purpose

- To understand the process for setting norms at collaborative team meetings.

Requirements

- A method for capturing the group's ground rules in a place where the whole group can see them.

Foundational Meeting Facilitation

The best meetings are action-oriented. If a meeting is not designed to make a decision or action plan, then the information is likely better conveyed in a memo. There are a number of tools that can aid facilitators in holding the most productive conversations to ensure meetings meet their purpose. Using the following tools and resources in a consistent manner allows for best possible feedback in moving action forward. These fall under the following categories, outlined in the boxes below:

1. Effective Facilitation
2. Questioning Routines and Discussion Starters
3. Setting Meeting Objectives
4. Creating Agendas

1. Effective Facilitation

The main task of a facilitator is to help the team increase its effectiveness by properly managing the meeting, not its content. He or she must manage *how* decisions are made, but not *which* decisions are reached. In order to do this they undertake a number of actions during a meeting to keep it on track:

- State the goal(s) of the meeting and lead in the establishment or review team norms.
- Intervene if the discussion goes off track or if unproductive behavior arises
- Ensure that all parties are included in the conversation, and no one dominates
- Summarize discussions, checking for understanding and clearing up misunderstandings
- Close out meetings, drawing the conversation to an end result or action

When choosing a facilitator, the following qualifications are ideal:

- Skill/experience in moderating or facilitating meetings with emphasis on the team dynamics of decision-making/problem-solving;
- The ability to design an effective meeting format;
- Sufficient knowledge of the topic and the ability to understand the issues facing the team;
- The ability to balance the competing interests of the team and sensitivity to the team dynamics;
- Expertise in focusing the process of the meeting; and
- A reputation for fairness and balance.

Facilitation Guidance

Purpose

- A document containing basic guidance for good facilitation.

Requirements

- Administrators and other facilitators must familiarize themselves with this resource.

Considerations for Responsive Facilitation

Purpose

- Guidance for facilitators on good practices in facilitating a variety of different meetings.

Requirements

- Administration and other facilitators to familiarize themselves with this resource.

Facilitator Tool Kit

Purpose

- A comprehensive document detailing the role of the facilitator from more basic group dynamics to more advanced project managing and measuring of impact.

Requirements

- Administration and other facilitators to familiarize themselves with this resource.

2. Questioning Routines and Discussion Starters

Best practices show how the most effective teams conduct conversations they find difficult to begin. In addition, effective teams are professional in how they question their colleagues in provoking the most productive conversations. If your role is to facilitate a team, the protocols found below can assist in this process, whether or not you use them in their entirety or simply pieces. Consider reviewing the protocols for tips and ideas on how to navigate difficult conversations or jumpstart slow discussions. There are four essential questions collaborative teams can utilize as discussion prompts:

- What is it we expect our students to learn?
- How will we know when they have learned it?
- How will we respond when some students do not learn?
- How will we respond when some students already know it?

Warm, Cool, Hard: Feedback Provided During Protocols

Purpose

- Gives teams guidance on how to best question each other in a way that's productive.

Requirements

- A facilitator to guide the process.

Guide to Good Probing Questions

Purpose

- Advice on what questions are the most useful for getting to the root of problems. Additionally, this resource has a number of examples of probing questions for use by teams.

Requirements

- A facilitator to guide the process.

PLC Discussion Questions for the Team

Purpose

- A series of discussion starters to begin conversations around how to best support students, and get them to success.

Requirements

- A facilitator and team assembled to do this work.

3. Setting Meeting Objectives

Setting an objective for a meeting involves being able to finish the statement “by the end of the meeting, I want the team to be able to...” The following questions can help you figure out the end of that sentence:

- What is the reason for the meeting?
- What do you want to accomplish?
- What specific outcomes are you trying to achieve at this meeting?
- How important is this outcome?
- How will you measure success in achieving this outcome?

Setting objectives helps you plan a meeting – the more concrete your meeting objective, the more focused your agenda will be. Having a concrete objective will also help you evaluate the effectiveness of the meeting. Objectives can be planned out for a full year when working through the SGO process – a sample of such can be found [here](#).

4. Creating Agendas

Providing an agenda before a meeting helps to ensure that there is enough content to necessitate a meeting, and work through the purpose of the meeting. Best practices dictate that an agenda should include:

- A brief description of the meeting objectives;
- A list of topics to be covered;
- How much time each topic will take; and
- The date and time (and location as appropriate) of the meeting.

Data Meeting Agenda

Purpose

- An agenda structured to assist an elementary school with using and discussing data in a team setting.

Requirements

- A facilitator and team assembled to do this work.

Math Team Meeting Agenda: Moving Beyond Data

Purpose

- An agenda designed to help a team of math teachers analyze results of an exam, and assess learning targets and problem solve for the future.

Requirements

- A facilitator and team assembled to do this work.

PLC Sample Agenda

Purpose

- A sample agenda from an elementary school in the Long Branch School District to provide ideas for a team meeting agenda.

Requirements

- A facilitator and team assembled to do this work.

Part 4: Advanced Level: Alignment, Integration and Relevance

When functioning at their highest levels, collaborative teams become an outcome-based group of educators consistently engaging in deep team learning. Teams learn by having evidence-based conversations focused on student achievement. The evidence emanates from SGOs and other common benchmarks. Based on this information decisions can be made in planning instruction moving forward. The second set of resources aids in this process by:

- Creating an environment where evidence-based conversations can consistently occur; and
- Helping schools consistently engage in the most productive evidence-based conversations.

Many of these resources contain links to other external tools and resources which can be used for this purpose.

Strategy 2.1: Mechanisms in Place for Making Effective Data-Driven Decisions

Advanced Protocols for Collaborative Teams

The following advanced protocols are designed to help collaborative teams in making data-driven decisions. The resources contained within are broken down into two categories:

1. Team Decision Making and Problem Solving
2. Using Student and Classroom Data in a Team Setting

The boxes below provide a description of each of these categories and the protocols that can help your team. *Note: As in the foundational level set of protocols, these also contain multiple activities under each category. Schools should only use those protocols which best match what they need to complete as well as what works best with their current reality.*

1. Team Decision-Making and Problem-Solving

Collaborative teams that are willing to delve into complex problems are inevitably faced with hard conversations and/or conflicts that must be resolved in order to progress. These resources offer suggested protocols for handling situations that may otherwise seem difficult and/or awkward.

Consensus

Purpose

- This protocol is a very simple structure for running a meeting when addressing issues that need to come to a decision.

Requirements

- A method for taking notes to ensure that all have been heard.

Five Whys Tool for Root Cause Analysis

Purpose

- This is a problem-solving technique assessing the root cause of a problem, allowing for a more strategic way to solve that problem.

Requirements

- A team assembled to do this work including people with personal knowledge of the processes and systems involved in the problem being discussed.

Tuning Protocol

Purpose

- This protocol aims to ensure educators receive direct and respectful feedback on the problems they present, working through problems with the team acting as advisors.

Requirements

- A team assembled to do this work.
- A presenter to bring examples backing up the issues presented.
- A facilitator who can keep the conversation moving.

Peeling the Onion: Developing a Problem Protocol

Purpose

- To provide a structured way to develop an appreciation for the complexity of a problem in order to avoid the inclination to start out by “solving” the problem before it has been fully defined.

Requirements

- A team assembled to do this work.
- A facilitator who can keep the conversation moving.

2. Using Student and Classroom Data in a Team Setting

The protocols in this group are designed to promote effective communication and build team structure through content-focused collaboration. The tools provided focus primarily on protocols for using student data, which is central to the SGO process.

Consultancy: Adapted for Examining Student Work

Purpose

- This protocol is useful for bringing up any questions or issues to the team about student work. In addition, it is broad enough to allow for addressing a number of different issues relating to it.

Requirements

- A presenter to bring examples of student work for discussion.

Walkthrough Planning Guide

Purpose

- This is a guide for how to conduct walkthroughs.
- This includes having discussion about the parameters and how feedback will be given on what is seen.

Requirements

- Printed packets of the planning guide.

ATLAS: Looking at Data

Purpose

- To facilitate ongoing conversations about student data presented to the group for interpretation, discussion, and figuring out the implications of it.

Requirements

- A presenter to bring the data in a method that can be seen by all parties.

Benchmark Data Analysis

Purpose

- A protocol designed to look at standards completed on a benchmark assessment, deciding which ones students scored highest, which they scored lowest, while comparing with other teachers.
- This team learning promotes discussions to discuss strategies in supporting student growth across the grade level.

Requirements

- A facilitator and team assembled to do this work.
Student benchmark data ready for the discussion.

Common Assessment Data Analysis Protocol

Purpose

- A protocol designed to complete item analysis for teachers using common assessments.

Requirements

- A facilitator and team assembled to do this work.
- Student common assessment data ready for the discussion.

Advanced Meeting Facilitation

Effective meetings are designed to make a decision or create an action plan. There are a number of tools that aid facilitators in making sure meetings are action-oriented. The purpose of these tools is to assist in this process. The resources contained within fall under the following categories:

1. Structured Meeting Minutes Templates
2. Action Items and Commitments

Using the tools explained in the following boxes in a consistent manner will allow for better feedback to move action forward.

1. Structured Meeting Minutes

While the facilitator may not be responsible for taking notes during a meeting, he or she should ensure that the person(s) taking notes have a structure for taking them. This is especially helpful as minutes should always be distributed to team members or other stakeholders after the meeting adjourns. Minutes can also be taken on an electronic version of the agenda, with the minutes following the structure of it.

[Google Docs Meeting Minute Templates](#)

Purpose

- This Google docs link contains a depository of hundreds of different templates for taking meeting minutes. These links can be used in google docs or turned into Microsoft Word documents.

Requirements

- Basic knowledge of Google docs.

2. Action Items and Commitments

Every meeting should drive toward how to act on decisions made. This is an important piece missing in too many meetings. When commitments are made they should be...

- Noted by the facilitator;
- Recognized in the minutes;
- Assigned to a team member(s); and
- Assigned date for the action item to be completed.

Assigning these action items as they arise during the meetings while publically tracking them ensures that follow-through will take place. If no action takes place, the assigned team member(s) should be held accountable in the following meeting.

[School Action Planning Example](#)

Purpose

- A sample action item template that has been filled out by a district team and could be modified for a school's purposes.

Requirements

- A facilitator and team assembled to do this work.

[Excel Action Items Template](#)

Purpose

- A more complex Excel spreadsheet for recording action items, including more columns than the above template. This template can easily be adjusted to fit a school's needs.

Requirements

- A facilitator and team assembled to do this work.

Strategy 2.2: Instructional Expertise to Guide Improvement

Having experts within the school community who can help unpack the standards, as well as subject area specialists to deepen content knowledge; and assessment specialists to support reliability and validity of assessments will greatly help in having standards-aligned material ready to make evidence-based decisions. For school districts needing help in this area, the links from the self-assessment can assist in developing good assessments, and using data to drive instruction.

Additional Resources from Self-Assessment

- [Assessment Design Module](#): A module assisting schools in creating well-designed assessments.
- [Assessment Design Toolkit](#): Online resources developed by the USED and NJDOE to support all aspects of assessment design.
- [SGO 2.1 Training and Guidebook](#): Guidance on monitoring cycles and using collaborative teams to review SGO data in monitoring and adjusting instruction. The resources accompanying the training offer assistance in determining rigor and unpacking standards.

Strategy 2.3: Engaging in Practices for Continuous Improvement

Data Audit

Schools collect several sources of data about student growth and performance from a variety of assessments, observations, and other sources, but these data do not always become available at a time that aligns with meeting times or required deadlines. Being intentional about when these data are collected, and when they are used, allows for better alignment and more productive meetings. Having access at the right time to student-level performance data can help to focus the conversation on growth and progress, which is the goal. This tool provides a starting point for conversations among educators about data and its purpose in school improvement or informing classroom instruction.

The goal of the Data Audit is to help school leaders backwards-plan from available data sources to specific instructional purposes and needs for their schools, making the most effective use of student data for a wide variety of purposes, including supporting SGOs.

Instructions: The following discussions should be cyclical ones between school leadership and other collaborative teams.

- School leadership (or district leadership) should begin the discussion and work through Steps 1 and 2 described below. Collaborative teams would follow, mirroring those steps.
 - The discussions among different levels are important to ensure that school leadership includes the teachers' perspectives and also to encourage a shared view of the school's work for the upcoming year.
 - Steps 1 and 2 require a recommended focused 45-60 minutes of discussion for each group. All schools and teams should be able to complete Steps 1 and 2.
- Step 3 is an increasingly advanced discussion to be held with school leadership and/or with collaborative teams either separately or together.
 - Step 3 requires 45 minutes.
 - Step 4 requires 45 minutes and can be completed with collaborative teams, with school leadership playing more of a participating or listening role.

Note: Ideally, this will take place while planning for an upcoming school year (late spring or over the summer). No matter when the discussions take place, some schools/teams may not be ready for the work of Steps 3 and 4.

Step 1: Brainstorming

Using the Data Audit worksheet [[Word](#) / [PDF](#)] as a guide, work together to brainstorm the following questions (use a whiteboard or butcher paper so that the brainstormed information can be seen by the whole group):

- What are all of the different sources of data available to your school (e.g., PARCC, district-written assessments, school-written assessments, observations, student and parent surveys)?
- What is the source of these data points (e.g., online databases, things that need to be obtained from the district)?
- What are the dates or date ranges when these data can be obtained by the school, and can these dates be moved?
- What are these data used for within the school right now (e.g., professional development meetings, data meetings, SGO deadlines)?
- Who has access to the data?
 - Do they need to come from the district?
 - Is there a testing coordinator who can obtain the data?
- Where are the data files stored?
 - Do they stay with teachers?
 - Are the data files stored centrally, accessible by the school as a whole?
 - Are they kept with SCIP, DEAC, etc.?

Note: This [Student Assessment Inventory](#) created by Achieve includes guidance on identifying all of the assessments students currently take; it is meant to help you work specifically through all of your assessments and decide if any should be eliminated.

Step 2: Assessing the Purpose and Timing of Pieces of Data

This activity aims to align the teams' goals with the availability of needed data. Schools do not have control over when some assessments are administered, or over other deadlines.

- For movable deadlines:
 - Discuss: Are there data sources for which you would like to change the timing?
 - Consider if assessments are currently being administered at times that align with SGO, professional development, or meeting deadlines.
- If the data source timing cannot be moved, or would not make sense to move, the team should consider if other deadlines could be moved.
- Looking at just those pieces of data that were previously established as "movable," use the Data Audit worksheet [[Word](#) / [PDF](#)] to work through the following questions:
 - What purpose does the data serve to support for other meetings/deadlines?
 - Will the data be available for those meetings or deadlines?
 - If the data will not be available, how will the meetings be moved?
 - Who will need to be involved in moving these dates?
 - Are there other pieces that will need to be moved as well as, or instead of, these data?
 - Think about other data you might need to track to measure implementation of a new initiative or the inputs to connect to student performance outcomes (*i.e., If you want to track student performance on a new writing assessment, do you need to track who was trained on the new writing program and the evidence of the program's implementation as seen in informal walkthroughs, or against impact on student writing scores?*).

Step 3: Aligning Data with SGO Steps

1.

- Think about how the available student performance data can fit into/support [the five steps of the SGO process](#). The data needs to fit the SGO step in terms of timing and in terms of what the step requires (i.e., *Step 2: Determine Students Starting Points has to be completed in September or October, so the data has to be available within that timeframe. In addition, the data needs to be appropriate for the required task, so the results of a diagnostic assessment in a specific content area would be an appropriate data source*).
- Considering this analysis, use the Data Audit worksheet [[Word](#) / [PDF](#)] to answer the following questions for each step of the SGO process (*Note: not all steps can necessarily be supported by already existing data*):
 - What data could be used to support this step of the SGO process?
 - What data could support teachers in best executing this step in the SGO process?
 - Do the relevant dates of the SGO process and obtaining the necessary data currently line up? If not, how will this be addressed?

Step 4: Conclusion

1. As a team, answer the following questions with a goal of using data more intentionally to support classroom instruction and school improvement:
 - What issues have surfaced during these activities?
 - Have we identified any gaps in available data?
 - Have we identified any major timing issues (conflicts/overlaps)?
 - Have we recorded specific follow-ups such as who will do what, and by when? (see chart below)

| Follow Up Action: | Responsible: | Deadline: | Notes: |
|-------------------|--------------|-----------|--------|
| | | | |
| | | | |
| | | | |

Concluding Discussion Questions:

- How can this information be shared with school leadership?
- What does the team need to address from school leadership to implement the necessary changes (if any) identified during this activity?
- What next steps have been prioritized by the team?
- What will the team do if not all of these changes can be made? What is the backup plan?
- How could the data noted in this activity be used to shape and drive school professional development planning requirements? (Requirements and templates found [here](#).)

Additional Resource from Self-Assessment

- [SGO 2.1 Training and Guidebook](#): Guidance on monitoring cycles and using teams to review SGO data to monitor/adjust instruction.

Strategy 2.4: Alignment with Key Instructional Deadlines and Activities

SGO Integration Tool

This resource is intended for collaborative teams to reflect and assess opportunities for SGO integration at your school and can be used as the basis for one or several team meeting discussions. The tool is organized according to the [five steps of the SGO process](#). Each bullet represents a set of questions (and suggestions) that could serve as the focus of one discussion or one meeting, or could be stretched out as a line of inquiry over the course of an entire school year. A collaborative team might use this resource in one of two ways.

1. Focus on one step of the SGO process that has been particularly challenging and prioritize alignment and integration opportunities for that particular SGO step; or
2. Choose one priority opportunity for each SGO step and seek alignment and integration across the entire academic year and entire SGO process.

In either scenario, the purpose is to bring classroom initiatives together and make instructional efforts more effective, while making SGOs support teacher practice and student achievement.

Step 1: Choose or Develop High-Quality Assessments Aligned to Standards

Questions:

1. How can your team structure support the process of selecting high-quality assessments?
2. What role do teams play?
 - If teachers have selected or created their own assessments, how and when can teams review and critique each other's assessments?
3. What assessments do you already give and when?
 - When do you get the results?
 - Do results come in time for use in the SGO process?
 - If not, are assessment windows flexible?

Suggestions:

1. Discuss ways the team can take their knowledge of the summative assessments currently being used for SGOs and create short-term common formative assessments to track student growth.
2. Discuss common assessments and their advantages with the faculty and/or make the case to the faculty for common assessments. Teams can discuss the opportunities common assessments would potentially allow.
3. Discuss how/whether current assessments might support the SGO process (see [Data Audit](#)).

Step 2: Determine Students' Starting Points

Questions:

1. Are there team structures in place with schoolwide expectations (norms, protocols) for what data should be considered in establishing a student's starting points?
 - If not, how can you establish such expectations?
 - How can teams support the work of establishing expectations for data use? (i.e. teams could be directed to collaboratively agree on what data will be used to establish starting points by grade level).
2. Where are there opportunities to share information vertically? (i.e. last year's teacher sharing with this year's teacher)
 - Could this be a part of the process of establishing students' starting points each year?
 - Can teams be restructured to align vertically for a meeting in order to share information?
3. In what ways can this data collection and compilation be done in teams (grade level or content)?
4. Do teachers have access to all the data they need?
 - How can the administration support this work?
5. How and when can student's starting points, once compiled, be shared within teams for feedback and review?

Suggestions:

1. Discuss how data collection and compilation in teams would support teachers, making the work either more effective and/or more efficient.
2. Discuss what is needed for teachers to have access to the data they need and a timeline for action steps.
3. Discuss the ways in which peer review could strengthen SGO quality.

Step 3: Set Ambitious and Achievable SGOs

Questions:

1. Why should SGO development be done in teams (grade level or content)?
 - Do you need to change the calendar of team meetings (in order to align with the SGO process and deadlines)?
 - What support do teachers need to make this an option?
 - What steps should be taken first?
2. How can SGOs, once developed, be shared within teams for feedback and review? How will feedback be integrated?
 - What does this review process look like (in terms of norms, protocols)?
 - How can teams ensure that SGOs are ambitious and achievable?
3. How can team meetings be used to support the SGO process and provide regular check-ins on teachers' progress towards SGO attainment?

Suggestions:

1. Discuss who needs to weigh in on making decisions to align the calendar, team meetings, and agendas with the SGO timeline.
2. Discuss how teams can support SGOs through collaboration and move away from SGOs as an individual activity.
3. Discuss these big questions at the beginning of the year when you are establishing the agendas and the goals for the year.

Step 4: Track Progress and Refine Instruction

Questions:

1. How can teams provide a structure that tracks class progress toward SGO attainment and listen to teachers' short cycle instructional planning for peer review and feedback?
2. How will teachers use team meetings (and possible protocols) to seek help with particular challenges and difficult cases (e.g. students performing below grade level) or new strategies for teaching complex content?
3. When can teachers look at SGO case studies together and practice data-based instructional decision-making as a team?
 - When can teachers apply the same practices to their own classes and then share the results with the team?
4. When can teachers analyze their own class assessment data and share with their team?
 - When can teachers use their data to refine their classroom instructional plans and share with teams for feedback?
5. How can teachers weigh in on strategies to support SGO attainment in the team context, including instruction, remediation and differentiation, assessment, and enrichment?

Suggestions:

1. Discuss how team structures can support teachers and also help to monitor student progress.
2. Discuss what supports can be offered to teachers as a direct follow-up from team discussions (i.e. what differentiated resources can the school offer to teachers?).
3. Discuss what a realistic cycle of learning, classroom practice and reflection might look like.
4. Discuss a timeline for when data is available, the time needed for analysis, and instructional planning, including any need for check-ins along each step of the way.
5. Discuss these big questions at the beginning of the year when you are establishing the agendas and the goals for the year.

Step 5: Review Results and Score

Suggestions:

1. Ask teams to review SGO evidence together at the end of the year and engage in structured professional reflection (note: This might be more comfortable if the team/grade/department has used common assessments).
2. Ask teams to share any schoolwide implications they see from SGO results and make recommendations for professional development or needed instructional supports.

The Big Picture and Calendar Integration Activities

To be used in conjunction with one another, the Big Picture and Calendar Integration Activities [\[Word\]](#) [\[PDF\]](#) are meant to take information to identify initiatives and high priority items. From there you can begin mapping out when they occur, find connections among them, and find areas where items can be moved or integrated with one another, ultimately aligning them with each teacher's long-range student growth plan.

The **Big Picture** is a four-step process to assist in developing a more integrated system in which school leaders and collaborative teams step back to view the "big picture" of their schools' initiatives and mandates which require their time.

[New Jersey's Standards for Professional Learning](#) remind us that student achievement is best realized through a comprehensive, sustained, intensive, and collaborative approach to improving

teachers' and principals' effectiveness. This definition is guided by seven standards. The leadership standard states any effort to increase educator effectiveness and raise student achievement requires skillful leaders who develop capacity, advocate, and create support systems for professional learning. The Big Picture activity, to be completed by a school leadership team (such as a [School Improvement Panel](#)) serves this purpose.

Each of the steps in the Big Picture process give your school teams the chance to collaborate, examine, prioritize, reflect, and make connections. The goals of this process are:

1. To help school leaders facilitate school-based conversations that acknowledge the tensions which might exist between instructional mandates or initiatives.
2. To identify commonalities that may exist across various initiatives or opportunities in the coordination of planning, aligning those opportunities around shared data.

Almost all teachers, administrators, and school building staff struggle to find adequate time to accomplish all the work they have on their plates. Often the “Have-To-Do’s” take priority over the “Want-To-Do’s,” even if the latter includes activities that add significant value to improving student learning. Clarifying and prioritizing instructional requirements, initiatives, and work requires long range planning. Therefore it is critical to look at the entire school year’s calendar and identify the key dates and times for all of the various initiatives and mandates your school is involved in. The **Calendar Integration Activity** is designed to assist you in this endeavor, serving as a visual tool that builds consensus and understanding of where there are commonalities, tensions or conflicts, and opportunities for alignment in the work being done in a school district during the year.

The goal is to help school leaders create more opportunities for educators to coordinate and collaborate around curriculum development, planning, assessment, and data-driven instructional improvement.

Additional Resource from Self-Assessment

- [NJDOE School and Professional Development Planning Requirements and Templates](#): NJ PDP information and templates.