

# Guide to Working With External Providers

Fourth Edition



**PARTNERSHIPS TO IMPROVE TEACHING AND LEARNING**

APRIL 2019



# Guide to Working With External Providers

## PARTNERSHIPS TO IMPROVE TEACHING AND LEARNING

Fourth Edition

APRIL 2019

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This work was originally produced in whole or in part by Learning Point Associates, now merged with the American Institutes for Research, with funds from the U.S. Department of Education under contract number ED-01-CO-0011. The content does not necessarily reflect the position or policy of the Department of Education, nor does mention or visual representation of trade names, commercial products, or organizations imply endorsement by the federal government.

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## About This Guide

In 2015, the enactment of the Every Student Succeeds Act (ESSA) ushered in changes for state accountability systems and guidelines for funding. ESSA allows for more targeted and diverse ways to meet student need than under No Child Left Behind. It shifts the responsibility for school improvement to districts while also requiring them to select evidence-based interventions to help schools improve.

Although ESSA defines what is meant by evidence-based interventions, districts are responsible for selecting and implementing the strategies that are best aligned to their school needs. This increased responsibility creates a greater need than ever before for districts to select partners to support and provide services that would be prohibitively difficult for a school or district to offer on its own. In many areas, school leaders recognize the valuable role that external providers can play in supporting school improvement work. However, finding a partner that is the right fit can be daunting and time consuming. This guide was developed to support state and district leaders in identifying and working with external partners.

In response to the shifting dynamics facing schools and districts, including shifts under ESSA, the American Institutes for Research (AIR) has updated this resource to support school leaders as they engage in partnership with providers to carry out this important work. The first edition of the *Guide to Working With External Providers: Partnerships to Improve Teaching and Learning* was researched and written by Bryan Hassel, PhD, and Lucy Steiner. Dr. Hassel is the current co-president and codirector of Public Impact, an education policy firm based in North Carolina. Steiner is the senior vice president for educator excellence and implementation services with Public Impact.

The fourth edition is based on existing research and field experiences related to how schools and districts can work most effectively with a host of external providers. During its initial development in 2004, as well as in subsequent editions, researchers reviewed the academic literature on school-provider partnerships; interviewed top scholarly experts on the subject; and consulted with numerous practitioners at the primary, secondary, and postsecondary levels who are involved in school-provider relationships. Those practitioners included representatives of schools, districts, and a range of external providers. Once the key facets of a partnership that lead to success were identified, drafts of the guide were subjected to rigorous review by evaluators, practitioners, and others with expertise in this area. Through the current iteration, updated to reflect shifts in state and federal guidance under ESSA, the authors focused on providing the best information for schools and providers to ensure that all stakeholders have the tools they need to ensure successful partnerships that will lead to lasting improvement in student outcomes.

## Acknowledgments

Numerous school and district leaders, academic researchers, external professional development providers, and reviewers contributed to this publication. In particular, the following people offered their support and insight:

- Catherine Barbour, AIR
- Trish Brennan-Gac, JD, AIR
- Cary Cuiccio, AIR
- John E. Deasy, PhD, Bill & Melinda Gates Foundation
- Dawn Dolby, AIR
- Stephanie Hirsh, Learning Forward
- Jessica Johnson, AIR
- Bruce Joyce, PhD, Booksend Laboratories
- Traci Maday-Karageorge, AIR
- Kathy Massey, formerly of Riverton Community Unit School District 14, Riverton, Illinois
- Matthew Mohs, St. Paul Public Schools, St. Paul, Minnesota
- Nancy Shin, HOPE Foundation
- Mark A. Smylie, PhD, University of Illinois at Chicago
- Jane Westerhold, EdD, Community Unit School District 62, Des Plaines, Illinois

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## **FOREWORD**



AMERICAN INSTITUTES FOR RESEARCH®

Dear Educator:

The *Guide to Working With External Providers: Partnerships to Improve Teaching and Learning* is a comprehensive toolkit. If you do one thing with this guide, please forward it to two people: (a) the person you have designated with responsibility for investigating whether to hire an external provider and (b) the person charged with overseeing that process.

As the leader of district and school improvement services for AIR, I am committed to delivering high-quality services in the field that positively impact student learning. We are passionate in our belief that all children deserve a quality education. However, we also know that currently not every child is in a position to realize his or her full potential.

In every state, schools are struggling to meet the educational needs of their students. ESSA places the responsibility for improving these schools and meeting students' needs in the hands of school and district leaders, requiring them to select strategies with a track record of improving outcomes.

We know that school improvement work is challenging. Many schools and leaders lack the ability and capacity to do this work on their own. Fortunately, there are experts—such as AIR staff—who are committed to school improvement work, have a proven track record, and stand ready and willing to partner with schools in dire need of turnaround assistance.

External providers that choose to partner with the nation's lowest performing schools to help set them on the track for success have critical key responsibilities. These providers have a moral and ethical obligation to do the following:

- Offer quality services and products that deliver results for children and schools.
- Ensure that the capacity exists within their own organization to maintain the integrity and quality of the services they promised to deliver.
- Collaborate with other partners that bring complementary expertise to a school or district.
- Address school culture and adoption barriers with all key initiatives.
- Position schools for sustainability by building local expertise and community-based support for the work.
- Enter into partnerships because they are a good match for both sides—not because it's just one more contract to feed the bottom line.
- Turn down work when it's not a good match because not every vendor is positioned to serve every school well.

- Contribute learning and best practices to the larger conversation on school turnaround so that effective practices can be brought to scale.

I am committed to these practices, as are many of my colleagues in the field. I hope this guide will help you make the best choices when identifying supports for your school or district.



Jessica Johnson  
Senior Vice President, AIR



## INTRODUCTION

### Purpose of This Guide

Schools and districts are turning more often to external providers (e.g., nonprofit organizations, consultants, and other education companies) to help improve teaching and learning. These providers offer their expertise to help with curriculum and instruction, strategic planning, professional development, technology use, leadership training, and other needs faced by schools and districts. These partnerships have great potential by bringing in much-needed perspective and expertise, but having an external partner is no guarantee of success. Schools and districts everywhere have struggled with how to make the most of their relationships with external providers.

Many schools and districts are feeling empowered by the opportunity provided by ESSA to select school improvement strategies that are targeted to their school needs. Many also are looking to hire an external provider to provide support in meeting these needs and understand the school or district's specific mission and vision. Schools and districts should be wary of providers that promise too much in terms of achievement gains. Successful providers know that high-quality interventions take time and a lot of work by both school and district staff and the provider. Schools and districts must be cautious of quick fixes and be prepared to commit to hard work.

Productive partnerships that are developed between schools and external providers are built on three strong building blocks:

- **Clarity**—a clear understanding of what the partnership will entail, what expectations all parties will bring to the table, and how the partnership will evolve and grow across time.
- **Communication**—a commitment on the part of all parties to provide ongoing feedback to one another and assess and improve the partnership as circumstances change, problems emerge, and successes occur.
- **Expertise**—a proven ability to affect change through evidence-based practices.

These three building blocks together serve as a conduit for both the school or district and the external partner to achieve the stated goals: a clear understanding of how to operate. Effective lines of communication allow an external partner to deploy its best practices to achieve results for students.

The purpose of the *Guide to Working With External Providers: Partnerships to Improve Teaching and Learning* is to help schools and districts put these building blocks into place and provide a better understanding of the issues that need to be considered when embarking on a partnership with an external provider. This guide is designed to provide a step-by-step approach to

- research and select a high-quality provider,
- establish an effective partnership agreement,
- manage the partnership, and
- evaluate the success of the partnership.

An additional aim is to provide information that digs beneath the surface and detail the lessons learned from actual schools and districts that have successfully negotiated these partnerships.

Working with an external provider is one step in a long improvement process for schools and districts. This guide aims to help a school or district with this one aspect of the reform effort. Although this step is important, the school or district must undertake significant work—before, during, and after working with an external provider—that is not discussed in depth in this guide. Figure 1 describes the steps in the school improvement process. Areas in bold type indicate steps that are covered in this guide.

### **Figure 1. Steps in the School Improvement Process**

#### *School Improvement Planning (not covered in this guide)*

- Create a shared vision for the school.
- Perform a comprehensive needs assessment.
- Consult with a wide array of stakeholders.
- Collect, organize, and analyze multiple sources of data for the needs assessment.
- Determine priorities and set goals.
- Develop a school improvement strategy and action plan.

#### *Selecting a Provider (the focus of this guide)*

- **Create a framework for the selection process.**
  - Establish a selection team.
  - Write a request for proposal (RFP).
  - Find potential providers.
- **Vet and select a provider.**
  - Conduct initial conversations.
  - Check references.
  - Reach an agreement with a provider.
- **Negotiate a contract.**
  - Clarify the package of services and materials supplied by a provider.
  - Determine actions and support provided by the school and district.
  - Determine the contract length.
  - Determine outcomes and evaluation measures.

- **Work in partnership with the external provider.**
  - **Create an implementation plan.**
  - **Overcome implementation barriers.**
  - **Use evaluation results to set new goals and reshape implementation.**
- **Plan for the future.**
  - **Reshape the relationship after the natural end of the contract.**
  - **Sustain the work.**
  - **Terminate partnerships that do not meet expectations.**

*Next Steps (not covered in this guide)*

- Select, revise, and eliminate other programs to sustain improvement work (ongoing).
- Work with the district office to distribute resources and consider structures in ways that best support implementation (ongoing).
- Reflect on, evaluate, and refine the plan and process.

This guide is not a comprehensive blueprint for overall school improvement. As indicated by the bold areas in Figure 1, it focuses primarily on selecting an external provider, establishing a strong relationship with the provider, working with the provider to implement its services, and using evaluation to improve the partnership’s effectiveness. Other critical steps in the school improvement process—such as performing a comprehensive needs assessment, aligning school or district efforts, eliminating programs, and reallocating resources—are discussed only in brief, although this guide directs readers to other resources where possible.

## How to Use This Guide

This guide serves as a resource for making decisions about contracting with external providers. It may be used by educators at all levels of the education system. Although the text is written to “speak” to school and district leaders, it also is applicable and helpful to others. State department of education staff, regional service agency staff, school and district leaders, and external providers will likely find the tools in this guide helpful while working with local education agencies to establish a process for selecting an external provider.

The process of identifying and selecting an external provider and then managing the relationship to ensure success deserves careful thought and planning. The steps and tools in this guide are presented in a sequential manner and can be followed step by step. Some leaders may find that certain steps in the guide have already been addressed or their school or district has an established procedure for a particular step. In such cases, leaders may choose to use the tools and guidance from some sections but not others. Education leaders and providers are encouraged to use and modify the tools in this guide to suit their specific needs and context.

## Section Structure

This guide has six main sections: Getting Started, Creating a Framework for the Selection Process, Vetting and Selecting a Provider, Negotiating a Contract, Working in Partnership, and Planning for the Future. Each section addresses vital issues that you should thoughtfully consider as you forge and manage relationships with external providers (see Figure 2). Each section has a series of steps that discuss the issue under consideration.

### Figure 2. Vital Issues Addressed in This Guide

- SECTION 1: Getting Started.
  - Know your school or district needs.
  - Consult with key stakeholders.
  - Plan your budget.
  - View the landscape of external partners.
- SECTION 2: Creating a Framework for the Selection Process.
  - Establish a selection team.
  - Write an RFP.
  - Find potential providers.
- SECTION 3: Vetting and Selecting a Provider.
  - Conduct initial conversations with potential providers.
  - Check references.
  - Reach an agreement with a provider.
- SECTION 4: Negotiating a Contract.
  - Clarify the package of services and materials supplied by a provider.
  - Determine actions and support provided by the school and district.
  - Determine the contract length.
  - Determine outcomes and evaluation measures.
- SECTION 5: Working in Partnership.
  - Create the school or district implementation plan.
  - Address common issues that arise during implementation.
  - Establish an evaluation plan.
- SECTION 6: Planning for the Future.
  - Reshape the relationship after the natural end of the contract.
  - Sustain the work.
  - Terminate partnerships that do not meet expectations.

**Section 1** will help you get organized and get started. Before you can begin the process of hiring an external provider, you must understand your needs and the resources available to you. Each remaining step should be aligned with your needs and fit within the resources you have committed.

**Section 2** will help you develop a structure to follow before you select an external provider. The steps are designed to help you do the following: (a) establish a selection team that is responsible for choosing a provider, (b) clarify your needs by developing an RFP that outlines the essential characteristics you are looking for in a provider, and (c) understand how to develop a list of potential providers.

**Section 3** outlines the actual selection process for finding an appropriate, high-quality provider. It takes you through the process of conducting conversations with potential providers, checking references externally, and reaching an agreement internally with the provider you select.

**Section 4** describes how to negotiate a contract that sets the stage for a strong and effective partnership. The section is organized into pairs of steps—one from the perspective of the school and district and one from the perspective of the provider—that are meant to demonstrate the complementary actions of each. Each step is supported by tools that both parties can use to set the terms of the relationship.

**Sections 5 and 6** describe the relationship between the school or district and the provider after the basic contract provisions have been established. The steps in these sections are written as joint actions, signifying that the school, district, and provider are unified in working toward the same goal of improved teaching and learning. Although these two sections discuss some issues that may not be documented in a contract, all these issues should be talked about before an agreement is reached. It is important to understand every issue that may potentially affect the partnership.

### **Tools in the Toolkit**

Where appropriate, this guide presents tools that are designed to help you think about the issues and communicate with the provider on the particular topic discussed in a particular section. (These tools, which are briefly described in Figure 3, are found in the Toolkit section at the back of this guide.) Although the tools are presented as documents that can be filled in, you may choose to use them simply as a starting point for discussion. Indeed, you or the provider already may have documents that either answer many of the questions posed in the tools or serve the same purposes. In either case, such tools may spark discussion and bring up issues not already under consideration.

**Figure 3. Tools**

- *TOOL 1: Request for Proposal (RFP) Worksheet:* A template to help you write an RFP
- *TOOL 2: Prospective Provider Information Sheet:* An information sheet to use as you gather background material about individual providers
- *TOOL 3: Prospective Provider Rating Worksheet:* A worksheet to rate how each provider fares after initial conversations are completed and references are checked
- *TOOL 4: Provider Services and Materials Questionnaire:* A questionnaire to ensure that you understand the specific details of a provider's services
- *TOOL 5: Gap Analysis:* A tool to document the gaps that exist between your needs and the services offered by a provider
- *TOOL 6: Provider Costs Questionnaire:* A questionnaire to help you understand the costs of a provider
- *TOOL 7: Provider Preferences for Supportive School-Level Policies:* A tool that allows a provider to identify school-level policies that are needed or useful for implementation
- *TOOL 8: Provider Preferences for Supportive District-Level Policies:* A tool that allows a provider to identify district-level policies that are needed or useful for implementation
- *TOOL 9: School or District Evaluation of Provider Services:* A template for assessing the quality of the services that a provider is delivering
- *TOOL 10: Provider Evaluation of School or District Implementation:* A set of questions to help a provider assess school or district progress toward implementation

Figure 4 is an easy-to-use list of tasks involved in working with external providers. Use the planner to organize your steps and meetings. It serves as a reminder of the process outlined in this guide. Each item in the planner is covered in more detail beginning on the pages listed.

## Figure 4. An Action Planner

### SECTION 1: Getting Started (page 11)

- STEP 1: Know Your School or District Needs (page 12)
  - Conduct a comprehensive needs assessment.
  - Identify expert sources to assist with the needs assessment (if required).
- STEP 2: Plan Your Budget (page 15)
  - Determine what resources you already have.
  - Determine your time frame and funding sources.
- STEP 3: View the Landscape of External Partners (page 15)
  - Identify the types of services offered.
  - Identify the types of providers.
  - Identify the characteristics of high-quality services.

### SECTION 2: Creating a Framework for the Selection Process (page 23)

- STEP 1: Establish a Selection Team (page 23)
  - Decide who should be on the selection team.
  - Decide what roles various team members will have on the selection team.
  - Decide what input other key stakeholders who are not on the selection team will have.
  - Determine the logistics of selection team meetings.
- STEP 2: Write a Request for Proposal (page 25)
  - Identify your most pressing needs.
  - Identify your budget, timeline, and logistical concerns.
  - Identify the outcomes you expect to get by hiring an external provider.
  - Identify the services you would like the external provider to deliver.
  - Identify your selection criteria.
  - Write an RFP outlining your needs, the outcomes and services you expect, and your selection criteria.
- STEP 3: Find Potential Providers (page 30)
  - Issue an RFP.
  - Consult with schools or districts similar to yours.
  - Consider various types of providers.
  - Contact professional organizations.
  - Conduct an Internet search.
  - Look at original research.
  - Ask another entity to conduct a search for you.

### **SECTION 3: Vetting and Selecting a Provider (page 33)**

- STEP 1: Conduct Initial Conversations (page 33)
  - Discuss your selection criteria with a potential provider.
  - Discuss the cost of services with a potential provider.
  - Discuss the outcomes you expect and your timetable with a potential provider.
  - Discuss the provider's evaluation strategy.
- STEP 2: Check References (page 36)
  - Ask the provider for references.
  - Contact schools or districts similar to yours that have worked with this provider.
- STEP 3: Reach an Agreement With a Provider (page 36)
  - Make sure you have done your research on each potential provider.
  - Ask key stakeholders to review or formally approve your choice.
  - Build support for your choice among the wider school community.

### **SECTION 4: Negotiating a Contract (page 39)**

- STEP 1: Clarify the Package of Services and Materials Supplied by a Provider (page 39)
  - Communicate the school or district's needs to a provider.
  - Identify gaps between what the school or district requires and what the provider's standard package or proposal can provide.
- STEP 2: Determine Actions and Support Provided by the School and District (page 41)
  - Discuss cost and payment arrangements.
  - Discuss school-level policies that are required for effective implementation.
  - Discuss district-level policies that are required for effective implementation.
  - Discuss other ways that the district can support implementation.
- STEP 3: Determine the Contract Length (page 44)
  - Agree on a contract length acceptable to both parties.
  - Work with the school or district attorney to draw up the best possible contract.
- STEP 4: Determine Outcomes and Evaluation Measures (page 45)
  - Agree on formative and summative outcomes measures.
  - Agree on a timetable for measuring outcomes.
  - Agree on rewards for achieving or consequences for not achieving the expected outcomes.

### **SECTION 5: Working in Partnership (page 47)**

- STEP 1: Create the School or District Implementation Plan (page 47)
  - Work with the provider to develop a flexible implementation plan.
  - Maintain open communication.
- STEP 2: Address Common Issues That Arise During Implementation (page 47)
  - Gain support from school staff.
  - Customize services to the local context.
  - Schedule professional development.
  - Find time to learn and reflect on new practices.
  - Address the problem of conflicting efforts and shifting priorities.
  - Align services with district and state standards and assessments.
  - Address turnover of leadership and staff.
  - Train new teachers.
- STEP 3: Establish an Evaluation Plan (page 55)
  - Align the evaluation plan with wider accountability systems.
  - Set up mechanisms for collecting ongoing and final evaluation data.
  - Collect information on the implementation process.
  - Collect information on how well the partnership is meeting expected outcomes.
  - Review evaluation data and make corrections to the partnership as necessary.

### **SECTION 6: Planning for the Future (page 59)**

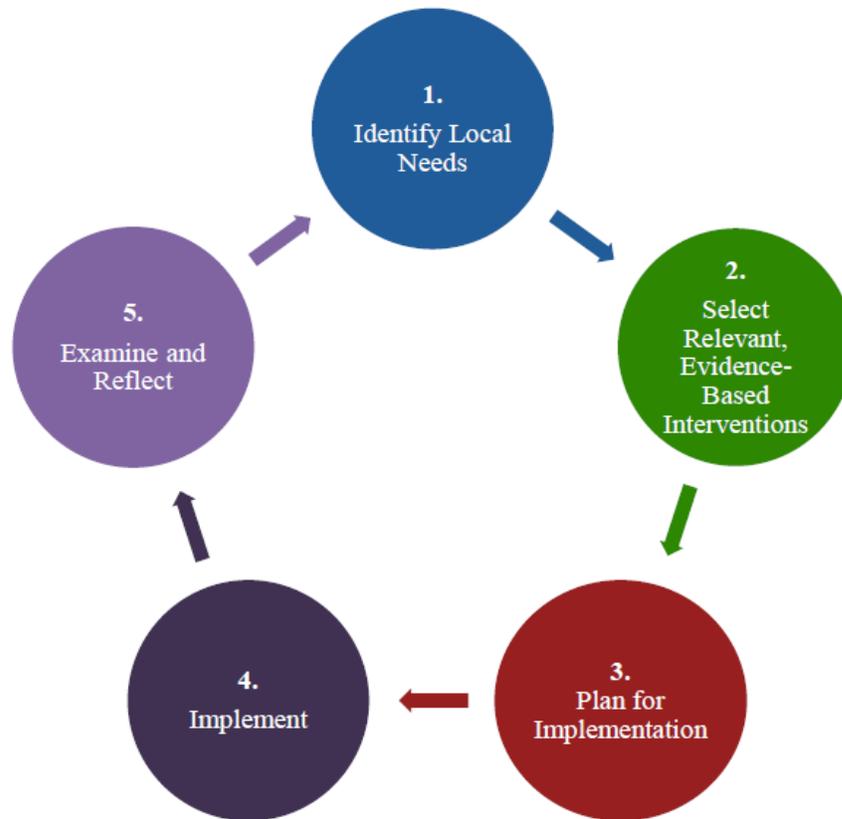
- STEP 1: Reshape the Relationship After the Natural End of the Contract (page 59)
  - Discuss the possibility of extending the length of the partnership.
  - Explore options with the assistance of the school or district attorney.
- STEP 2: Sustain the Work (page 60)
  - Embed sustainability strategies throughout the implementation.
  - Emphasize capacity building and leadership continuity.
- STEP 3: Terminate Partnerships That Do Not Meet Expectations (page 60)
  - Agree on the grounds under which the parties might decide to end the partnership.
  - Agree on the logistics of terminating the partnership.



## SECTION 1: Getting Started

Under ESSA, the U.S. Department of Education emphasizes that schools and districts participate in a cycle of continuous improvement. As defined by the Department of Education, this cycle has five steps (see Figure 5). External organizations can be critical partners during any of these stages.

**Figure 5. The Continuous Improvement Cycle (U.S. Department of Education, 2016)**



Regardless of how an external partner assists with the continuous improvement cycle, schools and districts should begin by analyzing their improvement needs. Many schools and districts engage with external partners to help provide an objective assessment of needs and recommendations for improvement before selecting improvement initiatives and outlining detailed improvement plans. This guide focuses on the partnership between schools or districts and external partners throughout the cycle of continuous improvement. Whether engaging with a partner to assess need, plan for improvement, or implement improvement initiatives, determining school or district needs is Step 1 for both the improvement process and when engaging with external providers.

## **STEP 1: Know Your School or District Needs**

The first step when embarking on an improvement initiative and enlisting an external partner is to gain a comprehensive understanding of your school or district’s context and current need, ideally with a comprehensive needs assessment. Even if state and federal accountability measures give information about deficits in student learning across a district or within specific subgroups, going beyond the reported data to fully understand and document a school or district’s need will greatly improve your understanding of what to expect from an external partner. Conducting a comprehensive needs assessment is not only an accepted best practice; under ESSA, it is required prior to the release of funds for comprehensive, targeted, and many other types of support.

As school and district leaders strive to improve their practice through intervention and formalized support, it is important to remember that the work of school improvement is complex and takes time. Rather than rushing to implement a program or bring in an outside expert to “fix” your school or district, it may be more efficient (and fiscally responsible) to first pause and understand how your school or district functions: How are big decisions made? Who has authority? Where is money being spent? What areas of student achievement need improvement? What are the current areas of strength? What do teachers need to know and be able to do to better meet student learning needs? Formalized learning about school or district needs has been shown to improve the eventual implementation of a reform or new intervention (Newmann, Smith, Allensworth, & Bryk, 2001).

### ***Why Is a Needs Assessment Necessary?***

A needs assessment is, first and foremost, a process that can help educators at all levels identify, understand, and better address education challenges. A needs assessment is generally defined as a systematic examination of the gap that exists between the current state and the desired state of an organization and the factors to which that gap can be attributed. The needs assessment process is an important first step in improving the effectiveness of education investments that lead to better outcomes for students.

An effective needs assessment helps local stakeholders and system leaders understand how the pieces of a complex educational system interact. Whether that system reflects a school, a district, or an entire state, a needs assessment can uncover both strengths and challenges that will inform growth and improvement.

The goal of a needs assessment is to help educators identify, understand, and prioritize the needs that a school or district must address to improve performance. Identifying priority needs is the first in a series of closely tied steps that also include understanding root causes that contribute to the areas of need, selecting evidence-based strategies that address those areas,

preparing for and implementing selected strategies, and evaluating whether those strategies are addressing improvement needs and achieving the desired results. The needs assessment becomes the beginning step of each iteration of a continuous improvement cycle (see Figure 5).

### ***The Value of a Needs Assessment***

A comprehensive needs assessment is crucial for sustained school improvement. Under ESSA, conducting a formal, comprehensive needs assessment is required to become eligible for certain state and federal funds. A successful needs assessment process helps you focus on your most pressing and important needs. Undertaking a thorough and comprehensive needs assessment sets the stage for all the upcoming work—for several reasons. A needs assessment

- determines whether a school or district needs outside help,
- builds on existing strengths,
- develops and communicates a vision for reform,
- prioritizes and determines what kind of help is needed,
- engages various stakeholders and increases local buy-in for the improvement initiative, and
- lays the foundation for a strong relationship with an external provider.

Although it is beyond the scope of this guide to offer how-to instructions on conducting a needs assessment, the importance of getting this step right cannot be overemphasized. You may be in a position to conduct a needs assessment internally. If so, you will want to modify some of the subsequent steps in this guide and have an internal needs assessment assume the highest priority. But if you are not in a position to conduct a thorough and comprehensive needs assessment, you may decide to turn to an external provider for help with this initial task. The option of collaborating with an external provider on a needs assessment has the advantage of providing an objective view of current practice. An external provider also may be able to provide new or different data not otherwise available to you.

### ***The Four Requirements of a Needs Assessment***

A good needs assessment must meet four requirements. First, it should get input from a variety of stakeholders, including not only school and district staff but also parents, community members, and students. All participant groups should be representative of the school population. This stakeholder input allows you to gather information about the beliefs and values that are unique to your school or district community—which, in turn, will influence the type and delivery of services that will best meet your needs. It is important to engage with stakeholders at various levels of the school or district system: parents and guardians, noninstructional staff, local business leaders, teachers, students, and school leaders can all be important sources of data for gauging the need of your educational community.

Second, a needs assessment should include multiple types of data to provide both a snapshot of current practices and an analysis of trends across a period of time. A thorough needs assessment should include quantitative data, such as student demographics, formative and summative assessment scores, graduation rates, attendance rates, or similar data. It also could include qualitative data, such as perception data from students, staff, and parents, that can provide insight into the experiences of each stakeholder group.

Third, a needs assessment should provide specific details about your students and the system that supports them. For example, identifying “reading” as a weakness in the school curriculum is too broad to be of much use. Instead, you should highlight which specific skills within reading are weak, as well as which subgroups of students (by grade level, native language, race/ethnicity, and so on) are having the most difficulty.

Alternatively, your school and district may have data that indicate specific subgroups are consistently being underserved by the curriculum that is currently in place. If this is the case, your needs assessment should be designed in a way that illuminates potential causes or impediments that stand in the way of meeting the needs for that group of students. Under ESSA, the federal government allows for more targeted and flexible spending by states and districts to meet the needs of specific subgroups that have consistently—and often historically—been underserved.

The needs assessment also should identify what aspects of the education system need attention. Data about the instructional delivery systems, resources, staff, programs, or practices that support student learning are as crucial for identifying needs as is an understanding of weaknesses in student learning. Pinpointing your cultural, systemic, and student-learning needs allows you to take the crucial next step: analyzing whether your school or district has the skills, materials, competencies, and resources necessary to meet these critical needs.

Fourth, a needs assessment should help you prioritize needs. Many areas may be identified for improvement, but if too many goals are set, it might result in none being achieved successfully. After determining your goals, they should be presented in a clear and concise manner that is accessible and understood by all major stakeholders. (For more information about how to conduct a needs assessment, consult the resources in Box 1.)

### Box 1. Suggested Resources for Conducting a Needs Assessment

*These resources may be helpful when performing evaluation during the reform process.*

- [Assessing School-Level and District-Level Needs](#) (n.d.)
- [Central Office Transformation Toolkit](#) (2013)
- [Choosing a School Turnaround Provider](#) (2010)
- *Data Analysis for Continuous School Improvement* (Eye on Education, 2003)
- [The District and School Improvement Framework for Systemic Improvement](#) (n.d.)
- [Meet the Promise of Content Area Standards: The Role of Third Party Providers](#) (2013)
- [Needs Assessment Guidebook](#) (2018)
- *Results: The Key to Continuous School Improvement* (Association for Supervision and Curriculum Development, 2006)
- [Using Needs Assessments for School and District Improvement](#) (updated 2017)

## STEP 2: Plan Your Budget

Before you can begin to invite external providers to submit a proposal, you must first determine what resources you have to devote to the selection process. The process to develop an RFP, solicit and vet proposals, engage stakeholders, and negotiate the contract will take time and requires a dedicated budget to support the work. You should be clear about the time frame, the allocated budget, and the staff time that you can dedicate to the process.

While developing your budget, it may be important to note that under ESSA, states and districts are encouraged to consolidate funding across federal, state, and local funding sources, including matching funds, that are meant to serve a particular group of students. This increased flexibility may mean that you have more funding to serve the needs of specific groups of students than you may have previously expected. Because of this, it may be necessary to engage a wide group of stakeholders prior to creating a budget if it is likely that some of those stakeholders may be willing to contribute funds for a specific project.

## STEP 3: View the Landscape of External Partners

After determining your need for external help through the needs assessment process and understanding your budget parameters, you can choose from many providers that offer a wide range of services. To get a sense of what the provider landscape looks like, read the following descriptions of the types of services offered, the types of external providers, and the definition of high-quality services.

### ***Types of Services Offered***

According to the school leaders and providers interviewed during the development of this guide, successful collaboration efforts are based on a variety of different types of services:

- Assessment strategies
- Classroom management
- Curriculum components
- Data collection and analysis
- English learners
- Equity
- Family and community involvement
- Instructional coaching and delivery
- Leadership coaching and development
- Needs assessment
- Parent engagement
- Professional learning communities
- Reshaping of school culture
- Root-cause analysis
- School governance
- Social and emotional learning
- Special education, Section 504, and individualized education program development
- Strategic planning
- Teacher recruitment, induction, and mentoring
- Technology evaluation systems
- Use of technology

Many external partners provide services in several different areas. In some districts interviewed during the development of this guide, multiple services were offered by a single provider. In other cases, a combination of services was offered by a host of providers across time. Although it may make sense to have multiple providers, a “combination” approach raises its own set of difficult issues that will need to be considered. Many partnerships falter because schools and districts are spread too thin and have too many competing initiatives. (More information about the selection process is presented in Sections 2 and 3.)

Of course, schools and districts may enlist many other kinds of external providers—companies that build schools, maintain school grounds, provide security, prepare lunch, and many other services. But the focus of this guide is on services that relate directly to the core work of schools: teaching and learning.

In addition, under ESSA, states have the ability to reserve 3% of their Title I funds for direct student services in districts that have large indications of need in their schools as a whole or for specific subgroups. ESSA allows a school or district to provide these additional direct services themselves, but schools and districts may use the funds to hire outside organizations or consultants to deliver services that would not otherwise be available. This expanded use of Title I to support additional direct student services includes funds used for the following:

- Enrollment in courses and learning opportunities not offered by schools or districts, including career and technical education
- Personalized learning and associated technology upgrades
- Credit recovery and academic acceleration programs
- Assistance for students preparing for and completing postsecondary examinations (Advanced Placement, International Baccalaureate, and college entrance examinations)
- Transportation costs associated with transferring to a school of choice, including voucher and charter schools

### ***Types of External Providers***

External providers fall into the following categories:

- **Regional Service Centers.** At the state level, many states have regional service centers that are designed to provide help in many aspects of school improvement—including staff professional development—to the schools in their geographic region.
- **State Departments of Education.** State education departments might provide various types of assistance, particularly to schools with persistently low student achievement. Many states maintain a list of approved external providers, sometimes called vendors.
- **Colleges and Universities.** Technical assistance centers or groups at colleges and universities often provide services to schools and districts. In addition, college instructors may be available to provide services. Such centers, groups, and individuals can offer a research perspective as well as a history of similar work in similar types of schools.
- **Professional Organizations.** Numerous professional organizations offer a range of services to their members. Included in this category are curriculum-specific organizations (such as the National Council of Teachers of English) and those associations targeted at particular types of school leaders (such as the National Association of Elementary School Principals or the National Association of Secondary School Principals).
- **Teachers' Unions.** Many teachers' unions offer technical assistance in a wide range of areas.
- **Private Providers.** Possibly the largest and most wide-ranging category belongs to private providers. These are individuals as well as larger organizations, such as textbook companies, that offer services to help schools in literally every aspect of school improvement. Private providers may be for-profit or nonprofit companies.

Before turning to an external provider, however, schools and districts should examine their internal resources. Districts themselves might be the best and most cost-effective option, depending on their capabilities. Many districts have instructional coaches, curriculum and program specialists, and other staff members with specific areas of expertise. These staff members often are the most efficient and successful change agents in their schools. Mentoring and peer coaching are two strategies that allow a school to grow internal capacity with existing expertise and resources. Using internal staff wisely and intentionally—perhaps by reallocating staff members to support a school’s highest priorities—can result in tremendous capacity-building benefits for a school or district.

### ***High-Quality Services Are Critical for Lasting Impact***

No matter what type of help your school or district may need and what type of provider you ask to provide it, research on the qualities of effective partnerships can serve as a guide when hiring an external provider.

Although current research does not provide a clear list of the most critical characteristics of high-quality provider services, the following qualities are the most relevant for schools and districts when evaluating the quality of multiple external providers. To avoid potential pitfalls experienced by many, schools and districts hiring an external provider should make certain the provider offers services that meet the following characteristics:

- **Aligned With Established Goals.** All plans and activities should be aligned with goals that were established by the school or district during the needs assessment and the school or district improvement processes.
- **Long Term.** The provider’s services should be offered as part of a long-term strategy for improved student learning. The provider should be candid about the fact that making changes to affect student learning is a complex and difficult task that takes time.
- **Customized.** The provider should be prepared to tailor its approach to the school or district’s unique circumstances and needs. It should have a viable plan to get buy-in from key stakeholders.
- **Evidence Based.** The provider’s approach should be grounded in research and backed by evidence. Under ESSA, specific guidance and definitions for evidence are clearly outlined and match the guidelines for evidence defined by the What Works Clearinghouse. ESSA outlines three tiers of evidence:
  - Tier 1, the strongest level of evidence, is provided when a large, randomized controlled trial involving multiple sites in the intervention has been published and shows a significant benefit without overriding negative effects.

- Tier 2 outlines a moderate level of evidence. It is provided when a quasi-experimental study shows evidence of likely positive effect without significant negative impacts.
- Tier 3 evidence does not come from an experimental study. Tier 3 represents correlational studies published by a neutral third party or a reputable research firm.

Figure 6 graphically represents how the U.S. Department of Education translated the tiers into levels of evidence.

**Figure 6. Levels of Evidence**

To support the identification and selection of evidence-based interventions, the U.S. Department of Education developed four levels of evidence.

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**STRONG EVIDENCE**

**Strong Evidence**  
Interventions with **strong evidence** have at least one experimental study that shows a statistically significant and positive effect without being overridden by other statistically negative evidence. The study must have a large, multisite sample with overlap in both population and setting.

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**MODERATE EVIDENCE**

**Moderate Evidence**  
Interventions with **moderate evidence** have at least one quasi-experimental study that shows a statistically significant and positive effect without being overridden by other statistically negative evidence. The study must have a large, multisite sample with overlap in either population or setting.

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**PROMISING EVIDENCE**

**Promising Evidence**  
Interventions with **promising evidence** have at least one correlational study that shows a statistically significant and positive effect without being overridden by other statistically negative evidence.

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**DEMONSTRATES A RATIONALE**

**Demonstrates a Rationale**  
Interventions that **demonstrate a rationale** are those with a well-specified logic model informed by research or evaluation where relevant research suggests the likelihood of positive effect and a study of the effects will occur as part of the intervention or is under way elsewhere.

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ESSA evidence standards:  
<https://www2.ed.gov/policy/elsec/leg/essa/guidanceusesinvestment.pdf>

If published evidence suggesting positive effects of a specific intervention do not exist, ESSA allows schools, districts, and third-party providers to use federal funding if the intervention or improvement strategy meets two guidelines: (a) Schools, districts, or third-party providers must present a clear logic model that outlines how the intervention is likely to produce the desired effects, and (b) a study that meets the threshold for strong, moderate, or low evidence must be in the process of being conducted as part of or in tandem with the intervention. Across all levels of acceptable evidence, it should be noted that qualitative or anecdotal evidence alone is not sufficient for an intervention to qualify as “evidence based.”

To find out whether the provider’s approach is evidence based, you must ask two questions.

- *Has the provider or another neutral third party published a study indicating evidence that the intervention produces or is correlated with your desired outcomes?* The highest level of evidence comes from a randomized controlled trial, although correlational and quasi-experimental studies meet the threshold of evidence under ESSA. If no previously published evidence exists to show an intervention’s efficacy, a correlational, quasi-experimental or randomized controlled trial must be incorporated into the intervention, along with a logic model detailing how the intervention will produce the desired results.
- *Does the provider have outcome data on the effectiveness of its products or services in schools or districts with demographics similar to your own?* Many interventions have been shown to have positive effects in specific contexts. Understanding how these contexts interact with the intervention is critical in determining whether they are sufficiently similar to your own to suggest the intervention will be effective in your context. If the provider does have such outcome data, request a contact person in that respective school or district to discuss these findings and determine the level of satisfaction that the school or district has with the provider.

**Capacity Building.** All services should be delivered with a strategy for training school or district staff to practice and assess these skills independently. The provider should have a plan to build capacity at the school or district levels and evidence that it has accomplished this goal in the past. These services could take the form of a train-the-trainer model, annual “brush-up” trainings, and/or the codevelopment of services with a site-based professional development design team. Another aspect of capacity building relates to the external provider’s capacity to deliver on the scope of work proposed. The provider should be able to demonstrate sufficient staffing, experience, knowledge, and capability to carry out the work. After you ask several providers for this information, it will be easier to determine which providers are providing information that is relevant and easy to understand. If the information supplied by a provider is unclear, it may be an indication of its inability to communicate effectively.

After completing the preliminary actions of knowing your needs, planning your budget, and viewing the landscape of external providers, your school or district is ready to embark on the specific steps of working with external providers.

### ***Low-Quality Services Increase the Chances for Failure***

Numerous studies have documented that money and time are wasted when interventions, trainings, and professional development meant to improve teaching and learning fail to address the key needs of the learning environment (LeFloch & Barbour, 2014). These low-quality services, including professional development activities that do not have an impact on student learning, often take the form of “one-shot” workshops with little follow-up and typically do not focus on the skills that teachers need to help students master specific content (Cohen & Ball, 1999; Garet, Birman, Porter, Desimone, & Herman, 1999; Little, 1997; Parsad, Lewis, & Farris, 2001). Although low-impact interventions and professional development activities are still undertaken in many schools, a growing number of studies have begun to show that interventions and professional development activities that follow the guidelines in this guide (and similar literature) have a direct, measurable impact on student achievement (Garet, Porter, Desimone, Birman, & Yoon, 2001; Johnson & Murphy, 2000; Kennedy, 1998; Smylie, Allensworth, Greenberg, Harris, & Luppescu, 2001; Wenglinsky, 2000). To make lasting change for the students you serve, it is critical to both clearly understand the needs you are trying to address with an initiative as well as ensure, through thorough vetting and communication, that an external provider can deliver on your intended goals.



## **SECTION 2: Creating a Framework for the Selection Process**

After going through an intensive process of determining a vision for the school, performing a thorough needs assessment, studying the types of services and providers that are available, and understanding the characteristics of high-quality services, you are now in a position to build the framework for a strong selection process. This process includes establishing a selection team, writing a formal RFP that outlines your needs, and finding potential providers.

### **STEP 1: Establish a Selection Team**

As states and districts shift to new accountability measures under ESSA, increased attention is being paid to the importance of involving multiple stakeholders in the school improvement process. This observation reflects the increasing recognition that schools and other educational settings are not only buildings that house students and classes but also critical components of the communities they serve. As such, it is important that leaders engage stakeholders to not only increase buy-in for their proposed initiatives but also determine the true needs of the people that a school or district serves.

When establishing a selection team, casting a wide net ensures that any decisions made respond to the real needs of the diverse students who attend your school. Broad involvement also helps foster ownership and a commitment to working with the provider to implement its services. Some administrators mentioned the importance of ensuring that these decisions are not perceived by teachers as yet another “top-down” initiative. The process of selecting an external provider should be transparent, and members of the selection team should regularly provide meaningful information to constituents about the process.

A second change under ESSA, compared with guidance under No Child Left Behind, is the encouragement given to districts to form “coalitions.” By joining with other districts seeking to solve similar problems of practice, coalitions can take advantage of economies of scale to more efficiently use resources and better serve their students. Coalitions such as California’s CORE districts worked with internal stakeholders and external partners to pilot a new social-emotional assessment as part of each district’s school evaluation system. Forming a coalition allowed this group of more than five individual districts located across the state to consolidate funds and provide more support for innovation (see West, Buckley, Krachman, & Bookman, 2018). The legislative support for coalition building outlined in ESSA suggests that investigating potential coalition building with districts facing similar problems of practice could be a very fruitful process to undergo prior to or while engaging with an external partner.

Your school or district already may have a group in place that could take on the job of selecting an external provider. At the school level, an existing school-improvement team or a site council may take on this task. At the district level, a committee with responsibility for curriculum and instruction or for aligning district initiatives might be tapped for this role if the group has broad enough representation. (For ideas about whom to include on a selection team, see Box 2.)

### **Box 2. Building a Selection Team**

When forming a selection team to choose an external provider, consider people such as the following:

- School and district administrators
- Teachers representing various grades, content areas, and teams
- Representatives from the school improvement team, the professional development committee, or another site-based management team
- Representatives of the teachers' union
- Other professional staff
- Parents
- Community representatives
- Students (especially at the secondary level)

If your school or district decides to create a new selection team, think about how this newly formed group will communicate and collaborate with preexisting committees. Be sure the selection team has representation from key constituencies within your school population. Also, be sure everyone on the selection team is assigned a role in the selection and implementation process. Although no one single person should be responsible for administering the entire process, identifying a team lead or a project coordinator will help keep the process on track. Designating a point person to be responsible for ensuring that project deadlines and benchmarks are met will increase the likelihood of identifying a suitable provider. The amount of time this person will need to devote to the task will depend on the scope of the work proposed and the amount of money devoted to the potential contract. The amount of time that a project coordinator will need to devote to the task of coordinating the process also will impact the budget allotted to the selection process.

Most schools and districts find that having the selection team report to someone with decision-making authority is essential to move the process forward in an efficient fashion. One way to balance these two concerns is to invite different types of input at different stages. For example, the selection team might invite other stakeholders to take part in the needs assessment process or conduct research on potential providers. Later in this guide (see Section 3, Step 3, on

page 36), you will find some suggestions about submitting the selection team’s decisions to a wider audience for review. The committee also may wish to weigh stakeholder expertise and the likely level of interaction with the provider when considering stakeholder input.

Finally, establishing a communications plan at the outset of this process can ensure that everyone has a clear understanding of how information will be shared throughout the selection proceedings and during project implementation. You should not take for granted that all stakeholders will be kept “in the loop” simply because they work together. Taking the time to identify the primary point of contact, when and in what manner information will be disseminated, and how questions or concerns will be communicated can prevent misunderstandings, the duplication of efforts, and missteps in the process.

## **STEP 2: Write a Request for Proposal**

Most districts and schools select external providers by word of mouth. A common scenario is for someone in the district office to ask around and find out where colleagues have gone for help and who has provided good services. Often, district administrators meet presenters at conferences and then invite them to do work in their districts. These approaches might work, but they are somewhat haphazard because they do not ensure that you are tapping into a broad range of available providers.

Successful partnerships between external providers and schools or districts typically begin with a more purposeful, targeted approach. First, members of the school or district selection team can design an RFP that spells out clearly what the school or district is looking for in a provider. Schools and districts that have determined their strengths and priorities for academic improvement during the needs assessment process are in a stronger position to write an effective RFP. Because they have put in hard work examining their current practices, including thinking about the shared values and beliefs that currently shape their school culture, they are ready to develop such a profile. This RFP may be publicly issued in such a way that providers are invited to bid on the work according to the specifications outlined in the profile. Or the team members might use the RFP internally to guide investigations into their options. Either way, building a list of components or characteristics to look for is an important step in making sure that you select the best possible provider.

### ***Thinking Through Your RFP***

When thinking through your RFP, consider the following questions:

- What are your needs?
- What are your budget, timeline, and logistical concerns?
- What are the needs and priorities of outside funding sources (e.g., federal grants, philanthropic grants)?

- What outcomes do you expect by hiring an external provider?
- What services would you like the external provider to deliver?
- What are your selection criteria?

**What Are Your Needs?** Based on the needs assessment process, you should have a solid understanding about the type of assistance needed in terms of “content.” However, you also need to decide how targeted the partnership should be because most schools need help in multiple areas. You will need to determine what areas are essential for the provider to focus on and which are merely desirable and could be abandoned if they would dilute the overall effort.

It is important to clearly identify the problem that an external partner can help a school or district solve or the subgroup that will specifically benefit from the services or supports that a partner will provide.

In the decision-making process, recognize that the most effective services are those that concentrate on the specific content that students will be asked to master, the challenges they are likely to encounter, and the evidence-based instructional strategies to meet those challenges. Many promising reforms have been less than successful in bringing lasting change because the reforms only tangentially affected the day-to-day lives of students and teachers. They failed to correct the core problems surrounding teaching and learning for which they were designed (Elmore, 1996; Fullan, 1982; McLaughlin, 1991; Russakoff, 2010; Tyack & Cuban, 1995).

**What Are Your Budget, Timeline, and Logistical Concerns?** In addition to selection criteria related to quality and fit, you also may have concerns about logistical issues, such as timing, cost, and service delivery. Before searching for a provider, you should clarify how much you are willing or able to spend. You also should have an idea of how long you expect the partnership to last. Both issues are subject to change as the partnership evolves (e.g., some providers will be able to help you identify external funding sources to support their services). At the outset, however, you should have a rough idea of how much you expect to spend and when you expect to see results. Depending on your circumstances—a remote or rural location, for example—you may have preferences about how services are delivered that need to be clarified from the beginning. These considerations will significantly narrow the field of providers. If you have few indications of how much a potential project is expected to cost, identifying and reaching out to schools or districts similar to your own that attempted similar projects can be an excellent way to begin gauging a project’s actual cost.

**What Are the Needs and Priorities of Outside Funding Sources (e.g., Federal Grants, Philanthropic Grants)?** The funds that comprise school and district budgets very often are intended for specific purposes. Some funds are earmarked for investments in technology,

specific program costs, or instructional materials. Federal funds typically are allocated, with guidance provided on allowable costs. Similarly, grants from philanthropic organizations often will be targeted to particular initiatives or improvement efforts.

One change to the federal funding guidelines under ESSA is the ability for schools, districts, and states to consolidate funds from private, local, district, state, and federal Title I funding streams that are aimed at serving the same subgroup or population. This increased flexibility is designed to ultimately increase the funding available to serve students from schools or subgroups that are consistently underserved. Both you and the external organization you hope to partner with should have a clear understanding of the expectations attached to the funding that will support the work of the external provider. In your RFP, be sure to clearly state what types of expenses are to be covered by the funds you are using.

**What Outcomes Do You Expect by Hiring an External Provider?** In addition to knowing what your needs are, you should describe the outcomes you expect as a result of hiring an external provider. The specifics of these outcomes will likely be modified during conversations with providers and contract negotiations. However, knowing roughly what you expect means you are more likely to select a provider that can accomplish your goals. In many cases, schools and districts confuse service delivery with outcomes. Simply delivering services is not a measure of whether a provider has succeeded. Outcomes should be described in terms of specific student and teacher learning that will occur based on the services rendered.

In writing your RFP, focus on specific achievable outcomes that can be measured. For example, many schools would like to improve student literacy in the early grades. But the specific outcomes that individual schools are looking for might be very different. School X might have the following outcome: “To vertically align the literacy curriculum in the early grades so that students’ sight-reading skills improve, as measured by reading records, teacher observation, and district-mandated assessments.” On the other hand, School Y might have the following outcome: “To identify and intervene with students who are not meeting grade level benchmarks based on assessments of phonemic awareness, fluency and comprehension.”

**What Services Would You Like the External Provider to Deliver?** At this point, you should begin thinking about the specific services you want a provider to deliver. As with outcomes, the specific services may well be modified at a later stage in the process. But having an idea of what you are looking for will help you conduct a more effective search. In many cases, the best mode of delivery may partially depend on the beliefs and values of your school community. (School beliefs and values are discussed in more detail on page 29.) For example, your desired outcome might be a higher percentage of students taking Algebra I in eighth grade. To accomplish this outcome, think about what kinds of services would be most effective with your teachers and

what you would want a provider to do. Some service ideas might be leading a series of professional development sessions for mathematics teachers, providing one-on-one coaching and modeling, or designing a system of peer observation and support. But perhaps you do not know what kind of delivery would be most effective. In such a case, indicate that you would like a provider to suggest a package of professional development opportunities that lead to higher numbers of students taking Algebra I.

**What Are Your Selection Criteria?** When determining your selection criteria, there are many things to consider, including (a) the five characteristics of high-quality provider services, (b) the kind of assistance you need, and (c) the beliefs and values of your school community.

- **The Five Characteristics of Quality Provider Services (Box 3).** Regardless of the type of service you need, you should insist on services that are aligned with established goals, part of a long-term strategy, customized, evidence based, and capacity building. These five quality factors (discussed in more detail in Section 3, Step 3 on pages 18–21) set the groundwork for outside help that will really make a difference in student achievement. To illustrate the importance of searching for providers that have these characteristics, look to the experience of one highly successful superintendent: When a provider refuses to customize its services, he looks elsewhere without hesitation.

#### **Box 3. Five Characteristics of Quality Provider Services**

- Aligned with established goals
  - Part of a long-term strategy
  - Customized
  - Evidence based
  - Capacity building
- **The Type of Assistance That You Need.** Beyond the basic characteristics of excellent provider services, look for other specific features so that you get assistance that fits your unique circumstances. One way that providers differ is in the intensity of the help they offer. Some providers, for example, offer services that cover virtually all aspects of a school's operations—from curriculum to governance to parent involvement. Other providers offer much more targeted help with a specific function, such as literacy coaching or analyzing assessment data.

Another factor that characterizes providers is the degree to which they focus on content versus process. Some providers train teachers to use a particular instructional strategy or curriculum component; others focus on making changes to school governance or teachers' collaborative working relationships.

Still another area where providers differ is in the prescriptiveness of their approaches. Some providers come with a focused, predetermined set of goals, skills, or materials; others work with school leaders to help them develop these aspects of their school improvement effort for themselves; still others offer a hybrid approach.

Finally, it is important to know that there are no “silver bullets” when it comes to school improvement. Improvement initiatives, such as new curriculum materials or new instructional practices, may provide the content; but, ultimately, people—teachers, support staff, administrators, and specialized staff—must take action. Staff must be actively engaged in the implementation of the improvement efforts led by the external provider. They also must be willing to commit to the hard work necessary for a successful partnership that improves student achievement.

- **The Beliefs and Values of Your School Community.** It is essential to know your school community when identifying the kind of assistance needed. During the needs assessment process, many of these issues should have surfaced (e.g., teachers’ beliefs about teaching and learning and their attitudes toward change, the current level of parent involvement, decision-making patterns, and staff members’ willingness to collaborate). Up to now, the process outlined in this guide has focused on the “hard realities” of your situation—the objective facts that describe where you are today. But two schools could find themselves in the same objective situation yet choose different paths because the values and beliefs that school stakeholders bring to the table are different.

The hard realities, for example, may tell you that you need to revamp teachers’ instructional behaviors to raise student achievement, but the providers will not tell you which of several instructional approaches will provide the best match to your needs. To answer that question, school or district leaders will need to reflect on the type of school they want to create and the kinds of approaches that are most likely to succeed. For example, some groups of teachers are eager for opportunities to team teach; other groups of teachers would find this approach extremely challenging.

### ***Getting the RFP Down on Paper***

After thinking through the kind of help needed (the “content,” the essential characteristics that all providers should have, the special considerations unique to your school or district community, and your logistical concerns), you are ready to write your own RFP. The RFP should state very clearly what you are looking for in a provider—in terms of not only the content of its services (e.g., help with curriculum development) but also its delivery style (e.g., a targeted provider that has a highly prescriptive approach to improving literacy).

**TOOL 1: Request for Proposal (RFP) Worksheet (see page 71)**

Tool 1 is a template designed to help you write an RFP. It asks questions about your needs, proposal requirements, expected outcomes, desired services, and selection criteria. By using this tool, you will have the material you need to create an RFP for selecting an external provider.

**STEP 3: Find Potential Providers**

Many different ways can be used to find external providers with the potential to deliver the help you need. By focusing on the priorities that you have identified, you can narrow down your search considerably because many providers will not offer services that fit your needs. At this point, you want to know if a provider offers the services you are looking for and, ideally, if the provider has had successful experiences working with schools and districts that are similar to yours. As you review the information for different providers, you may learn of other potential services that you did not consider. The more research that you can conduct in advance, the more you will learn about your needs as well as the various providers available to help you in your mission to improve your school or district.

***Build a List of Potential Providers***

Initially, you will want to build a manageable list of potential external providers to contact directly for more specific information. In terms of whom to consider when building that list, the following are some suggestions from successful “buyers.”

**Issue an Actual RFP.** Developing and issuing an RFP may seem like daunting tasks, but careful thought and investment in planning can result in stronger improvement proposals and partnerships than those without a deliberate plan to solicit and vet external providers. Both large and small schools and districts can benefit from the process. Issuing an RFP also can be beneficial if you are unsure of the best strategy for improvement or if the potential pool of external providers is uncertain. The key to this strategy would be to distribute the RFP to a broad range of providers. For ideas about where to send the RFP, see Box 4. (See Types of External Providers on pages 17–18 for additional information.)

#### **Box 4. Types of External Providers**

- Regional service centers
- Technical assistance centers or groups at colleges and universities
- Professional organizations
- Teachers' unions
- Private providers
- Other resources that can suggest providers
  - State vendor lists
  - State departments of education, which may be able to provide some guidance on vendor selection

**Consult With Similar Peers.** Using word-of-mouth recommendations alone are not sufficient; you can learn a great deal by speaking with schools or districts that have similar needs. What providers have they used in the past? Which ones were helpful? Which were not? Consulting with your peers also can yield information about the likely costs of different services and the funding sources available to pay for them.

**Look at the Provider List.** Box 4 is a good place to start a more general search. Consider each type of provider and the following questions: Is this type of provider available to me? (For example, does a local college or university have professors willing to engage in the type of work you are looking for?) Is this type of provider likely to provide high-quality services in the areas you are looking for? If the answer to these questions is yes, add this provider to the list of providers that you will want to investigate further.

**Contact Professional Organizations.** By contacting well-respected, high-quality professional organizations, you may get recommendations for strong external providers. This source may be a particularly good place to get recommendations—as long as you do extensive follow-up research on the possibilities. One thing to determine when contacting a professional organization is whether the organization offers its own services or recommends the services of other providers.

**Conduct an Internet Search.** There are several angles for searching on the Internet, some of which depend on your specific needs. One approach is to get more information about providers that you are considering by reviewing their websites. The second approach is to enter a specific curriculum or an instructional service directly into a Web search engine and see what turns up. For example, searching for “cooperative learning” or “building collaborative teacher teams” will turn up several promising references to existing books and programs. The authors of these books might be excellent candidates to provide help or direct you to other resources. The

prevalence of blogs and other social networking sites can provide another means for soliciting recommendations. However, if you are unfamiliar with using these sites, you are encouraged to seek guidance from a more experienced peer so that you are not bombarded with responses.

**Look at Original Research in Your Area of Interest.** Another way to find high-quality providers is to find out who is doing research in your area of interest. Try searching the [What Works Clearinghouse](#), the online federal education database, or do a library search of relevant research articles in scholarly journals. You might find someone who has the latest information about your particular area of need. If these researchers do not offer services themselves, they may be able to recommend someone or an organization that does work with schools directly.

**Ask Another Entity to Conduct the Search for You.** If conducting a search seems overwhelming, another possibility is to ask another entity to help you conduct a search. A trusted provider you have worked with in the past, a local university or community college professor, or another knowledgeable advisor might be willing, for a fee, to help review the type of help available in your area(s) of interest.



**TOOL 2: Prospective Provider Information Sheet (see page 76)**

Tool 2 is an information sheet for you to use as you gather background information about individual providers. You may want to make several copies of this worksheet to use as you collect information.

## SECTION 3: Vetting and Selecting a Provider

As mentioned at the beginning of this guide, two building blocks are essential for establishing a strong relationship with an external provider: clarity and communication. These building blocks are especially important when selecting an effective provider.

### STEP 1: Conduct Initial Conversations

Until now, the burden has been on you to set the stage by clarifying your needs. At this point, you are ready to meet with potential providers to communicate your needs and determine which provider will best meet them. To compare each provider fairly, a good practice is to develop a prepared list of questions that you ask each provider so that you can compare their answers. During the conversations, take notes so that you have adequate documentation to draw on as you later assess the candidates. Tool 2 (page 76) provides space for writing these questions and each provider's responses; it also provides space for additional notes.

For most school and district leaders, it is important to have a scoring template. This can be a simple checklist, a rubric, or a standard set of questions with a Likert scale to rate the responses. The aim is to establish a standard set of criteria to evaluate the responses. Such a form also should provide space to write additional notes about each provider so that you have adequate documentation to draw on as you later assess the candidates. You can use Tool 3 (see page 79) as a template for rating potential providers.

During these conversations, the provider has an equal responsibility to determine if the school or district is appropriate for its services. To lay a firm foundation for a strong working relationship, this step requires full disclosure of information and open communication between both parties. This disclosure includes a frank conversation about accountability status and potential consequences for a lack of success as well as a discussion of the current school culture: decision-making processes, the level of teacher collaboration, teachers' openness to new instructional methods, the stability of school staff and leadership, the level of parent participation, and other factors. In these conversations, you should consider the following questions.

**Does the Provider Offer Services That Meet the Essential Criteria You Identified While Developing the RFP?** By having the RFP on hand and asking about essential criteria, you can be sure you are getting information about the provider's ability to meet your particular needs.

**Does the Provider Offer Services That Exhibit the Five Quality Characteristics?** Every provider you consider should offer services that are aligned with established goals, part of a long-term strategy, customized, research based, and capacity building. These characteristics are crucial;

unfortunately, they are not always easy to determine. For example, many external providers cite research that supports their approach. One question to ask would be if this research is self-generated or independent. See Tool 2 (page 76) for sample questions that you might ask to determine if the provider’s services have these characteristics.

**Are the Provider’s Services Cost-Effective?** Presumably, all schools and districts operate within budget parameters when hiring external providers. In general, research has shown that schools and districts spend 1% to as much as 8% of their total budget on professional development (Choy & Chen, 1998; Miles, Odden, Fermanich, Archibald, & Gallagher, 2003). This amount compares with the 4% or 5% spent, on average, by private industry on employee training (Klein, Medrich, & Perez-Ferreiro, 1996). In addition to finding external funding, many districts and schools have identified additional funds for professional development by reallocating existing resources (see Box 5). Whatever the source of funds, seek a provider that is upfront about both direct and indirect costs associated with its services and provides value for the money.

#### **Box 5. Suggested Resources on Resource Reallocation**

- [Allocation Anatomy: How District Policies That Deploy Resources Can Support \(or Undermine\) District Reform Strategies](#) (2008)
- [Maximizing ESSA Formula Funds for Students: State Readiness Self-Assessment](#) (2016)
- [Reallocating Resources to Support School Improvement](#) (2009)
- [Restructuring Resources for High-Performing Schools: A Primer for State Policymakers](#) (2011)
- [Strategic Designs: Lessons From Leading Edge Small Urban High Schools](#) (2008)
- [Student Based Allocation](#) (2019)
- [Supplement Not Supplant Under Title I, Part A of the Elementary and Secondary Education Act of 1965, as Amended by the Every Student Succeeds Act](#) (2019)
- [Take a Whole New Look at How to Use Resources](#) (2016)
- [The Three Essentials: Improving Schools Requires District Vision, District and State Support, and Principal Leadership](#) (2010)
- [Thought Leadership Forum Brief: Braiding Federal Funds Under ESSA](#) (2017)
- [Toolkit: Advancing Equitable School Funding Under ESSA](#) (2018)
- [Unlocking Federal and State Program Funds to Support Student Success](#) (2018)

**Has the Provider Demonstrated That It Can “Hit the Ground Running”?** Experienced providers should be able to outline a clear and systematic plan for the steps of implementation. Even if the provider intends to modify its plans to fit the circumstances or preferences of a particular school or district, it still should have an overarching implementation strategy that can be

discussed with some specificity during the selection process. The provider should know what components of its services should receive the initial focus and how and when the other components will eventually be introduced.

**What Is the Provider’s Approach?** Ask the provider to furnish additional details about the initial proposal of work and answer specific questions. Write the responses and share them with other stakeholders to allow you to compare proposed services with other providers. In most cases, a single provider will not meet every expectation of a school or district. Schools and districts need to gain an upfront understanding of what a provider can offer, what it cannot offer, and what it might be able to provide with appropriate modifications.

**Do You and the Provider Agree About the Outcomes Expected From the Partnership?** During this initial conversation, you will, of course, want to discuss outcomes. Although this conversation is not the appropriate time for a detailed discussion of every potential outcome and how they will be measured, be sure that you and the provider are in general agreement. For example, some providers may be reluctant to set student-achievement targets, whereas others routinely include targets in their proposals. This situation may depend on the provider’s level of engagement with the school. You also will want to confirm the cost of services provided. (For a more thorough discussion of outcomes, see Section 4, Step 4, on page 45.)

**Does the Provider Have a Strategy for Evaluating Whether Outcomes Are Met?** A strong provider will have a clear evaluation plan that includes both summative measures (to gauge whether specific goals have been met at the end of a partnership) and formative measures (which can be analyzed during a partnership to determine if implementation is on target).

**Do You Have Personal Rapport With the Provider?** A provider’s staff should listen to your concerns and spend as much time asking questions as it does talking about services that can be provided. Consider how well you think you would work with the provider’s staff and how well you think other people from your school or district would work with them. Unlike the other issues discussed in these questions, your instinctive feelings about whether you want to work with a particular provider are purely subjective. Every person who was interviewed during the development of this guide agreed that when entering into a partnership, it is imperative to take these subjective criteria into account. In fact, most said that they ultimately chose one provider over another because the school or district believed that it could work better with the people involved. The school or district learned to select a provider that seems trustworthy, likable, and straightforward.

To make this determination, it is important to find out—to the extent possible—which specific individuals will be providing the services. Especially in larger organizations, the people involved in making the “sale” may not be the ones delivering the “goods.” However, when responding to

a competitive RFP, an external provider might not be awarded the work. This reality makes it difficult to guarantee that specific individuals will be available and not assigned to other work when and if the award is made. In this type of a situation, the provider should still be able to describe the qualifications and credentials of a pool of on-site staff members who deliver the types of services you are looking for. Find out about stability by asking how much staff turnover the provider has. Be cautious about a provider that cannot tell you anything about the staff members who will be implementing its services.

## STEP 2: Check References

As a last step before making a decision, the selection team members should contact other schools or districts similar to their own that have worked with the provider being considered. This step may involve a telephone call or visits by members of the selection team to another school or district for site visits and interviews. During these conversations, it is important for the selection team members to check whether the information received from the provider is accurate by asking about the “must-have” characteristics that a school identified during the RFP process:

- Does the provider offer services that have the five essential characteristics?
- Does the provider have the characteristics you identified as critical to your school or district?
- Did any problems occur during implementation?
- Have the provider’s services achieved the expected results?
- Did the school or district have a good working relationship with the provider?
- Did the provider deliver as promised?



### TOOL 3: Prospective Provider Rating Worksheet (see page 79)

Use Tool 3 to rate how each provider fares after initial conversations are completed and references are checked. You may want to make several copies of this worksheet to use as you determine ratings for each provider.

## STEP 3: Reach an Agreement With a Provider

After collecting the proposals submitted by potential providers and gathering information directly from the provider and other schools or districts that have used this provider, the selection team should have the information needed to come to a consensus about which provider to recommend. Even though you have been gathering some degree of input throughout the selection process, the next step in the decision-making process is to ask a wide range of stakeholders to review your decision.

If your school or district is taking on a comprehensive partnership that will involve multiple stakeholders and services, you might decide to go through a formal decision-making process to select a provider from the proposals submitted. Some districts approach this task by asking key stakeholders to vote on whether to hire a particular provider; others build consensus by holding a series of informational meetings. Regardless of the actual process used, you will want to ensure that these meetings and discussions include a fair representation of those who will be interacting most with the provider.

Before scheduling these meetings, consider how you will reach each constituency most effectively. One option is to develop a formal presentation that outlines each provider's background and the services proposed for implementation. The presentations can be delivered by school and district staff or a potential provider itself. Other options include small-group discussions, parent forums, surveys, and feedback sessions in which the provider answers questions from particular stakeholder groups.

Your choice of delivery will depend on the characteristics, prior experiences, and needs of your unique school community. The important thing is to design a presentation mode that is comfortable for all participants and invites genuine input.

If you are hiring a provider for less comprehensive services, you will still need to ask key stakeholders to review your decision. In many districts, the key stakeholders at this point are the people who hold the purse strings: the superintendent (and/or the assistant superintendents) and the school board; their agreement is critical. In most cases, you also will want to get input from the wider community to ensure that even a small-scale partnership has solid support. A wide range of potential stakeholders can be considered, including teachers, noninstructional staff, school support teams, parents, community members partnering with the school, and district officials. When determining what role various stakeholders will play, strive to create a healthy balance between casting a wide net and creating an efficient process that allows for closure.



## **SECTION 4: Negotiating a Contract**

After finalizing your choice for a provider, you are now in a position to begin negotiations with the provider to establish a contract and a working relationship that is acceptable to all parties. This section of the guide explores four central issues that make up the framework of a partnership agreement with a provider: the package of services and materials the provider will supply, the actions that the school and district will take to facilitate implementation, the length of the contract, and the outcomes and evaluation measures.

### **STEP 1: Clarify the Package of Services and Materials Supplied by a Provider**

The core of any partnership agreement is a clear statement of the package of services and materials that the provider will offer to a school or district. Most external providers will have a standard package of services. The aim of this part of the negotiation is to explore ways in which the standard package might be customized to the school's circumstances or requirements.

For this negotiation to be possible, the provider must make clear the specific services and materials that will be provided and the background and qualifications of the staff members who will be delivering them. In particular, be sure to ask the provider to identify if subcontractors will be used and, if so, for what services. Ask the provider to give notice when it is hiring new subcontractors and allow you an opportunity to weigh in on their selection. Further, if the provider offers on-site consulting, the school needs to fully understand what the duration, frequency, and content of the services will be; if and how the provider encourages peer coaching; and what procedure will be used if the school finds the provider's consultants unacceptable for any reason.

The school also must be fully aware of what materials and services are required for implementation but not included in the package of services. For instance, the extensive use of computers may be part of the provider's intervention, but the provider may require the school to provide the actual equipment. A failure to work out format, content, and logistical details before implementation begins can lead to unnecessary tension in the working relationship and, possibly, unsatisfactory outcomes.



#### **TOOL 4: Provider Services and Materials Questionnaire (see page 82)**

Tool 4 helps you understand the specific details of a provider’s services. You also may use this tool as a comparative checklist if the provider presents a draft contract that outlines its proposed services. Using this checklist should reveal any areas of uncertainty or misunderstanding about the proposed package of services.

Schools and providers need a process by which they can agree on the services and materials. Using the information from the needs assessment and the priorities listed in the RFP as a starting point, both parties should identify “gaps” between what the school and district require and what the provider’s standard package can provide. For example, some providers may not have strong capacity-building strategies in place to keep the intervention thriving after their work is completed. Because capacity building is critical for long-term success, you should insist that the provider modify its services to include this component.

To identify gaps, consider the following questions:

- What areas of need are not addressed adequately by the chosen provider?
- In what ways, if any, do the provider’s services not match with state and district standards, curricula, or assessment practices?
- Do any required programs or practices that the school must pursue conflict with the provider’s services?
- What unique values are held by the school community that might be accommodated by the provider?

These gaps can form the basis for discussions about where the provider’s services can (and cannot) be modified to fit the school’s circumstances. Areas where services can be adapted should be included in the partnership agreement.



#### **TOOL 5: Gap Analysis (see page 84)**

Tool 5 helps schools and districts document the gaps that exist between their needs and the services offered by the provider. By using this tool, both parties should have a clear picture of the services and materials the provider will provide, including any modifications to the provider’s standard package.

## **STEP 2: Determine Actions and Support Provided by the School and District**

All providers need some degree of support at both the school and district levels to implement their services successfully. Schools and districts must provide a certain infrastructure—an infrastructure that may or may not be in place at the time a provider is hired. Although beyond the scope of this guide, an important piece of the infrastructure is the skills and knowledge of the school- and district-level personnel who are carrying out the work entailed. Information about staff skills is presumably clear from the needs assessment and should be shared with the provider, but most providers also have their own methods of assessing existing staff knowledge and designing programs to address weaknesses and enhance strengths. Accordingly, this section of the guide focuses on the parts of the infrastructure that providers are less able to influence directly: authority, resources, and support.

### ***Cost and Payment Arrangements***

During contract negotiations, providers must do more than apprise schools and districts of what services and materials they will furnish. They also need to specify how much the services and materials will cost. In addition to direct costs, the provider needs to make clear to the school and district what costs of implementation are not included in the stated price. Being upfront about both direct and indirect costs avoids later misunderstandings that can undermine the partnership. Look at all the proposals you received and use the most detailed cost descriptions to help you ask questions of other providers' proposals—particularly those providers that offer the lowest quotes. Other costs might include teacher stipends for extra time spent on professional development, technology and equipment, travel, and substitute teachers. The provider also should articulate how costs will be affected if improvement needs change after the start of the contract and outline a process for adjusting and approving new or revised services and associated costs.

If costs are a concern, many schools or districts try to resolve this issue by requesting that the provider submit a more detailed description of services and costs and then eliminating some to bring the price more within their desired range. When working with a provider, a straightforward approach is recommended. Tell the provider what your concerns are related to costs and ask if the provider's services can fit within your range. Otherwise, you may end up eliminating a critical service that you may have otherwise preserved by negotiating with the provider. The provider may be able to suggest minor changes in the service delivery that will save dollars while preserving the overall integrity of the final deliverables.

The issue of payment will likely involve two major discussions: one between the school or district and the provider to determine the payment schedule and, if necessary, one between the school and the district office to clarify how the school will pay for implementation. The discussion between the school or district and the provider is important for determining the times and

frequency of payment. No matter how the budget allocation for a school works, the school and district should strategize ways in which the external provider can be paid in a timely fashion. By the same token, the provider will need to adjust to when the school or district can pay.

**Important Note:** Once you have paid the provider, you lose your leverage if you are dissatisfied with any of the work that the provider has performed. In the contract, you can stipulate, for example, interim payments (which will be issued based on the satisfactory completion of the assigned tasks that meet the benchmarks outlined in the agreement) and the final payment (which will be issued no less than 30 days following contract completion).



#### **TOOL 6: Provider Costs Questionnaire (see page 86)**

Tool 6 helps schools and districts get a handle on the costs of a provider by guiding them through a set of questions concerning the costs of general assistance, consulting, professional development, materials, and other services. It also provides space for providers to note additional staffing, equipment, and other options not included in the contract.

### ***Supportive Policies for the Partnership: School Level***

Providers may have certain requirements or preferences about school policies and procedures. With regard to school leadership, providers may require that principals attend training sessions with the faculty. With regard to school staff, providers may require a certain amount of common planning time for grade-level teams each week; they may need teachers to attend a certain number of days of professional development on a certain schedule; or they may need schools to use certain evaluation procedures or provide certain kinds of data on an ongoing basis. Whatever the provider's preferences, they should be made clear during contract negotiations.



#### **TOOL 7: Provider Preferences for Supportive School-Level Policies (see page 89)**

Tool 7 allows the provider to identify school-level policies that are needed or useful for implementation. For each area identified by the provider, the tool allows the school to describe whether these policies are in place. Additional space is provided for both parties to address the differences between what the provider requests and what the school can offer.

### ***Supportive Policies for the Partnership: District Level***

Providers also differ in the types of authority, resources, and support that they expect from the district. Understanding these expectations upfront can help the district set priorities for improving its own infrastructure for reform. This kind of advance planning helps avoid common problems during implementation. The district plays an important role in supporting implementation through adequate funding as well as supportive policies and procedures:

- **Adequate Funding.** Districts can provide funds in a number of key areas: ongoing professional development, technology, conferences, and substitute teachers.
- **Supportive District Policies and Procedures.** Such policies and procedures may include the following: clear lines of authority, leadership stability, evaluation procedures, focus and alignment with other initiatives, and direct technical assistance.
- **Clear Lines of Authority for Decisions About Budgets, Staffing, Scheduling, and Programs.** Many providers suggest interventions or practices that require districts and schools to make substantial changes in their current operations. The provider should know the personnel at the school it needs to work with to implement the changes. For example, many schools have some school-site autonomy with regard to curriculum; other schools, however, are required to use districtwide curriculum materials. In the latter case, a school that wants to introduce new curriculum materials will need to get a waiver from the district office to do so. All parties should be clear about who in the district office has the authority to grant such a waiver and, ideally, whether that office is willing to grant the waiver in advance.
- **Leadership Stability.** Because a change in personnel can easily derail an effort, districts should work hard to maintain leadership stability. Recognizing the importance of this task, one superintendent said he begins planning for a successor as soon as he makes a new hire. He also works only with providers that have strategies for building capacity throughout the school so that new practices can continue under new leadership.
- **Evaluation Procedures.** Do the evaluation procedures of the district align with those of the provider? What role does data-driven decision making currently play in school operations? Does the district report achievement data to schools in an ongoing and timely manner?
- **Focus and Alignment With Other Initiatives.** Do the services of the external provider align with other district initiatives? In many cases, competing district initiatives or changing priorities are a major barrier to new partnerships. To the extent possible, providers will want to know their partnership is important to the district and will continue to be a priority for the duration of their working relationship.
- **Direct Technical Assistance.** Some districts, especially large ones, may be in a position to provide schools with technical assistance that supports or complements the provider's services. For example, the district office may have a team of data specialists, curriculum

providers, or literacy coaches who could be brought in to help with a particular intervention or be trained along with school staff.



**TOOL 8: Provider Preferences for Supportive District-Level Policies (see page 90)**

The provider may use Tool 8 during contract discussions to make known its preferences for district support. Discussion should focus on discrepancies between the support the provider requests and the support the district is willing or able to provide.

### STEP 3: Determine the Contract Length

All parties must agree on an acceptable contract length. A school, district, or provider may be reluctant to sign a long-term contract because of uncertainty as to how well the services will work at the school. Even though establishing benchmarks of progress may ease uncertainty, some reluctance may still be evident. However, a long-term contract can benefit everyone in three ways: (a) A long-term contract sends a signal that the district and the school recognize improvements in student achievement and teacher practice take time and effort; (b) a long-term contract demonstrates a long commitment, which will help teachers feel more secure in supporting the reform, thus potentially leading to better implementation and outcomes—a definite benefit for the school; and (c) a long-term contract may benefit the provider, the school, and the district by helping justify the substantial investments made in the effort upfront.

While determining the parameters that will be included in a contract for a long-term project, it is important for school and district leaders to pay attention to published schedules of statewide changes in education policy. This is especially true when funding is expected to come from a school or district's label as needing comprehensive (CSI) or targeted (TSI and ATSI)<sup>1</sup> support and intervention. Under ESSA, states must determine appropriate timelines for updating their school evaluation criteria. Some states have chosen long intervals between evaluation revisions, stretching 3–5 years, whereas others choose shorter windows, and still others use a mixture of both. Because much of the federal funds being allocated to districts and schools is based on an individual school's performance on evaluation criteria, shifts in state policy are likely to impact the budgets for initiatives targeting underserved populations. Be sure to consult your state education agency's website or district liaison prior to committing to a long-term contract to ensure that you are prepared for any potential changes to funding streams that might occur during the contract.

<sup>1</sup> CSI: Comprehensive Support and Improvement; TSI: Targeted Support and Improvement; ATSI: Additional Targeted Support and Improvement

In addition, some funding sources may envision partnerships that extend across multiple years. A common way to resolve contract-length tensions is to agree to an annual contract with the possibility—and indeed expectation—of renewal. It also is possible to enter into a multiyear agreement with periodic reviews and clearly stated grounds for early termination (which are discussed in Section 6, Step 3, on page 60). The school and district should work with the district’s attorney to draw up the best contract for their circumstances.

#### **STEP 4: Determine Outcomes and Evaluation Measures**

Ideally, discussions about outcomes have taken place prior to this point. Most likely, negotiations would not have reached this stage without straightforward conversations about what the school or district can expect to happen by hiring a particular provider. But that is not the same as writing outcomes and evaluation measures into a contract. It is important to remember that every partnership will be unique. The following questions are likely to arise during the drafting process for a new contract, so reviewing these questions before meeting with a potential external partner will give you a firm footing from which to begin negotiations.

**How Will the Findings Be Used?** Certain types of funds (including Title I) have specific guidelines surrounding reporting on fund use and impact. It is in the best interest of both the selection team and the external provider to incorporate these expectations into the contract to ensure continued good standing with state and federal agencies. If the initiative is part of an ongoing study destined for publication, additional reporting requirements may be needed to fulfill a publisher’s expectation. It is highly recommended to consult the [What Works Clearinghouse](#) guidelines when designing evaluation criteria for initiatives whose results are likely to be published.

**How Are Outcomes Described?** As mentioned earlier, some districts will not work with a provider that does not set goals for improved student achievement. Such goal setting should include not only the goals themselves but also the measurements used by the provider and the school or district to determine if these goals are met. Many schools and districts are under tremendous pressure to meet current state and federal accountability provisions, and they will likely hire a provider that understands and appreciates their sense of urgency. On the other hand, some successful providers are wary of other providers who promise too much in terms of achievement gains. Successful providers know that high-quality interventions take time and a lot of work to accomplish and are affected by circumstances that are beyond the provider’s control. In other words, beware of quick fixes. Some providers deal with this dilemma by setting “targets” for student achievement gains versus promising that certain gains will be met.

In addition to student achievement gains, other ways to measure the effectiveness of an intervention during implementation are specific to the intervention itself. For example, a

provider focusing on building collaborative teaching teams could measure whether and how often teachers are meeting, how often they are using new instructional strategies because of these meetings, and whether teachers report that these meetings are effective and useful. A strategic planning helper could be held accountable for meeting deadlines, stakeholder evaluation of its processes, and being responsive to inquiries and requests.

The important things at this stage are to include reasonable measures of the intervention's final results and institute some process of feedback and discussion to evaluate how things are going so that midcourse corrections, if needed, are possible. The contract should include not only what will be measured but also a timetable for the evaluation of outcomes.

**What Hinges on the Outcomes?** This question is key. As mentioned earlier, many providers typically include targets for improved achievement in a contract, but they are not willing to tie their compensation to specific test-score increases because so many factors are beyond their control. However, a provider may be open to other possibilities. One approach to the issue of setting student achievement targets, for example, is to offer the provider a potential bonus if the targets are met. Other possibilities include continuation of the contract, which could be broken down into ongoing continuation and renewal of the contract for another year. In other words, what expectations must the provider meet to keep the job from month to month? Or, what expectations must the provider meet to get the job again next year? (For assistance in thinking through the criteria you might use to evaluate a provider, see Tool 9 on page 91.)

## **SECTION 5: Working in Partnership**

By carrying out the activities described in earlier sections, each party has had the opportunity to make clear what it needs, what it expects, and how it can contribute to the implementation of the provider's services. These actions are essential elements of any successful partnership. In addition to these actions, a key consideration is how the work will actually be done. Working in a partnership requires a game plan for implementation, troubleshooting, and evaluation. The responsibility for a successful outcome is shared between school leaders and providers.

### **STEP 1: Create the School or District Implementation Plan**

Entering into a partnership, any well-prepared provider should have an already established, systematic plan for the steps of implementation. Based on its experience, the provider should know what components of its services should receive the initial focus and how and when the other components will be introduced. Even if the provider has modified its plans to fit the circumstances or preferences of a particular school or district, it still should have an overarching implementation strategy that is made clear to the school and district at the beginning of the partnership.

To ensure results, the implementation plan should include provisions for periodic rethinking of the implementation strategy and regular monthly check-ins. Schools, districts, and providers are dynamic systems that should respond to new situations and research. It is possible that an implementation strategy designed 2 years previously may no longer be the most effective strategy. Therefore, any implementation plan should remain flexible enough to respond to new environments or information. This is especially true if the district is acting as part of a coalition working to implement a change or intervention. By maintaining open and frequent communications, the school, district, and provider should be able to discuss honestly any need for revision of the implementation plan and come to a consensus about the revision. As mentioned previously, consulting with planned changes to district and state evaluation criteria prior to engaging external partners is highly recommended to anticipate any changes that might occur during implementation.

### **STEP 2: Address Common Issues That Arise During Implementation**

The key factor in confronting problems is maintaining ongoing communication. Establishing a plan with designated channels for communicating will help ensure that concerns are shared in a timely fashion. Regular check-ins and coordination meetings to discuss progress and implementation concerns will ensure that issues are addressed before they grow into full-scale problems. Such communication allows the partners to be proactive rather than reactive. Ongoing communication also facilitates the sense of having a shared goal. If the school, district, and provider all see

themselves as being on the same team, this connection will lead to less finger-pointing when a mistake is made—because mistakes will be made. The connection also promotes more constructive discussion on the question, “How are we going to solve this problem?”

It is helpful to keep a written record of the communication between parties. For example, some providers keep a log of when communication took place with school or district staff, what was discussed, and what actions were taken as a result of the discussion. According to the interviewed providers, such logs help prevent misunderstandings from turning into full-blown problems.

For a detailed explanation of common issues that may arise and potential responses for dealing with those issues, see Box 6.

**Box 6. Common Issues That Arise During the Implementation of Provider Services**

*The following issues commonly arise during the implementation of provider services. Possible responses for addressing each issue are included.*

**Issue 1: Gaining Support From School Staff**

*Responses:*

**Support Teachers in Their Ongoing Efforts to Help Students Succeed.** The following narrative, which is reprinted with permission from the American Federation of Teachers (2010), provides suggestions for supporting teachers.

**What Teachers Need to Help Students Succeed**

*If you want to know what teachers need to succeed in the classroom, ask them.* The [American Federation of Teachers] uses a number of ways to hear directly from our members what they need to do their jobs well. Recently, we asked members what they need to help their students succeed. Not surprisingly, with members in urban, rural and suburban schools spread across the country, we got a range of answers. Some needed basic supplies, such as paper or more textbooks.

Others asked for common planning time to consult with colleagues. Still others needed less tangible—yet just as crucial—supports, such as greater respect. These diverse responses all come down to three things teachers need to do a good job for their students: tools, time and trust.

**WHAT OUR MEMBERS SAY:***Tools*

At the school level, teachers and their students need essential supplies, small classes, a safe teaching and learning environment, adequate facilities, current technology and opportunities for parental involvement. Teachers also need common standards for what students should learn, as well as solid curricular materials, pre-service training, professional development, and assessments designed to help students meet those standards.

*Time*

Teachers spend hours outside of the school day grading papers, creating lesson plans, meeting with parents, and participating in school activities. They work late into the night, and get up in the morning to do it all over again. We can help them by giving them more time during the school day to come together to resolve student issues, share lesson plans, analyze student work, discuss successes and failures, and learn through high-quality professional development. With a team of teachers—not just one at the front of the room—we can help make sure students don't fall through the cracks.

*Trust*

Teachers must be treated as partners in reform—with a real voice. When teachers are involved in decision making—from the very beginning and through the very end—students benefit. Whether it's a school district seeking a federal grant or an individual school seeking a safer environment for teaching and learning, classroom educators who work with students every day must be involved at every step in the process.

**Establish a Mechanism for Staff Members to Voice Their Concerns.** Schools and districts hiring an external provider should have completed a comprehensive selection and buy-in process. This situation, however, is not always the case. Some schools may have providers selected for them and feel no ownership of the partnership. One way to gain staff support after implementation begins is for school leaders to establish a mechanism through which staff can ask questions about the provider as well as offer insight and suggestions for implementation on a regular basis throughout the project. This approach gives staff a sense that they are being heard, which is an important component in gaining support for any new initiative.

**Demonstrate Concrete Proof of the Provider’s Positive Effects and Stakeholder Support.** Offer concrete proof of the provider’s “small” successes (i.e., successes with students with the same demographics). Although significant test-score gains may not occur within the first year of implementation, progress can be demonstrated in other ways. For example, a teacher who has seen students blossom after adopting new practices may be asked to “tell a story” about the progress that some of these students have made. Stories are powerful because they can help skeptical teachers understand how to use the new practices in their classrooms. Such teachers also might be convinced if the school surveys parents, students, and others who all voice support for the intervention.

**Establish Mentoring or Coaching Relationships Between Teachers Who Have Experienced Positive Results and Teachers Who Have Not.** While recognizing that success stories may inspire other teachers to try more determinedly to implement new practices in their classrooms, school leaders also may want to consider establishing more involved mentoring relationships between teachers who are having success and those who are not. Skeptical teachers will then have an opportunity to learn about and gain confidence in the new practices. Establishing these relationships must be done carefully to avoid insulting any teacher. School leaders may find that establishing a supportive relationship between teachers may yield more support for—and success with—the provider’s interventions.

**Consider Allowing Teachers Who Do Not Support the Reforms to Transfer to Another School.** For a variety of legitimate reasons, some teachers may simply not support or feel comfortable with a provider’s interventions, even after having had opportunities to express concerns, hear about positive results, and receive training and mentoring. When this situation occurs, some districts allow teachers to transfer to other district schools. Some districts place restrictions on the number of times a teacher may transfer or the period of time the transfer option is available. These considerations depend on an individual district’s circumstances. Although not all districts favor allowing a teacher-transfer option, the benefits of having supportive teachers implement new practices and keeping teachers happier in their work environment may make the transfer option worth considering.

## **ISSUE 2: Not Enough Customization to Local Context**

*Responses:*

**Gather Information About How Interventions Are Challenging Existing Practices, Values, and Norms.** Experienced providers recognize the importance of designing interventions and services that adapt to the local context. Some of this planning can

be done ahead of time; but, in many cases, the complexities of a school or district’s culture surface only during implementation. For example, teachers may be uncomfortable taking on new decision-making responsibilities as required by a particular intervention. In this case, the provider might need to offer teachers more training on researching new curricula and instructional strategies that meet their particular students’ needs than they had anticipated.

To recognize what is going on, both the provider and school or district leadership should collect ongoing feedback about implementation. Through scheduled observations, teacher surveys, and regular conversations, providers should assess the “sticking points” related to staff members putting new practices into effect.

**Rethink the Implementation Strategy.** After all parties recognize where these “sticking points” are, the school, district, and provider should discuss the need for revising the implementation plan. If the provider is willing and able to make midcourse corrections in its implementation strategy, the contract may need to be revised as well—depending on the nature of the changes. At the same time, certain aspects of the implementation may be nonnegotiable from the provider’s point of view. It is important for all parties to understand these nonnegotiable issues upfront so that everyone can focus attention on those items that are more flexible.

### **Issue 3: Scheduling Professional Development**

*Responses:*

**Clarify the Exact Dates of Provided Staff Development.** Some schools enter into contracts expecting that providers will conduct professional development sessions during the district’s designated professional development days. Because providers cannot always plan their offerings according to the schedules of individual schools, the school is then forced to pay for substitute teachers to allow staff to attend the training on regular school days. Understanding the proposed dates before beginning implementation will allow the school to make a fully informed decision in provider selection, negotiate with the provider for different training days, petition the district for a waiver from mandated scheduling of professional development days, or make the necessary substitute arrangements in advance if neither the provider nor the district is able to accommodate the school’s requests for flexibility.

**Reach an Agreement With the District on Flexibility in Scheduling Professional Development Days.** Schools generally have limited professional development time and face competing schedules on the part of the district and the provider. Having the autonomy to choose days for staff training will decrease the expense and difficulty that schools face in juggling district-designated professional development

days and the availability of provider training. Potential savings in hiring fewer substitutes is one reason a school can give the district to gain flexibility in the scheduling of staff development sessions.

#### **Issue 4: Finding Time to Learn and Reflect on New Practices**

*Responses:*

**Make Scheduling Changes.** It is very difficult for teachers to find the time to learn and practice new strategies. After assessing how much additional time staff will need to implement new strategies, schools and districts often need to rework their schedules in a variety of ways to free up time for training, reflection, and collaboration. Some strategies include providing extended-day programs, scheduling late-arrival days, reducing some nonteaching duties of the staff, and making the most of the summer months. Depending on the flexibility of the current contract, schools and districts may need to renegotiate certain aspects of teachers' contracts (or arrange waivers or memoranda of understanding) to accommodate these new work arrangements. Teachers also may need additional pay to compensate them for the additional hours they are working beyond the school day.

**Integrate Professional Development Into Other Activities.** When the learning of new strategies is built into routine practices, it becomes a powerful tool for change. Instead of relegating professional development to specific inservice days, schools can make professional development a part of each staff member's everyday work by integrating teacher learning into activities such as staff meetings, student evaluation, and collaborative curriculum planning.

#### **Issue 5: Conflicting Efforts and Shifting Priorities**

*Responses:*

**Limit New Initiatives.** Districts can be laden with new initiatives or programs that "sounded ideal" to those bringing the new services to the district. Among providers and schools, there is a common understanding that districts need to carefully examine what is already on their plate and limit new initiatives. One superintendent even went so far to create a "new initiative process" for her district by insisting that every new initiative be brought before an established committee that examines whether the new initiative is necessary and aligned with existing efforts.

**Eliminate Programs That Conflict With New Initiatives.** In some cases, bringing in a new provider creates inherent conflicts with existing efforts. For example, a provider that encourages teachers to research and select new curriculum materials may run up against a previously established curriculum selection process. In other

cases, to implement a new provider's services, the school and district may need to free up staff time by eliminating other programs. In either case, open communications are needed for these changes plus a willingness on the school or district's part to acknowledge and respond to these requests. Clearly, eliminating existing programs can be extremely difficult, particularly for schools that lack resources. Yet by taking action, the school or district sends a powerful signal to everyone involved that this initiative has a high priority and is not just another program that will go by the wayside (Newmann et al., 2001).

### **Issue 6: Alignment With District and State Standards and Assessments**

*Response:*

**Clarify With the External Provider How Its Assessment Mechanism Will Correspond to State or District Assessment Requirements.** In addition to mapping out how a provider's services will meet the state or district's curriculum standards, schools also need to be clear on how the provider's assessment strategy matches any state or district assessment requirements. Although ESSA allows districts and coalitions to pilot alternative assessments (see West et al., 2018), plans for these assessments must be approved by the state education agency. As such, it is important to reference state and district standards and assessment criteria or review the process for piloting alternative assessments before engaging with an external partner. If school or district leaders do not, they may expend a lot of effort in testing students and compiling portfolios that ultimately cannot be used.

### **Issue 7: Unacceptable Provision of Services**

*Responses:*

**Establish a Contact Person Within the Provider to Address Difficulties With Service or Materials Delivery.** Before embarking on implementation—and as part of communication planning—the school should clarify whom it should contact in case any service or product concerns need to be addressed quickly. Accordingly, this person should have authority to remedy the situation in a prompt manner; his or her name should be identified in the contract. Having an available, authoritative contact person also will benefit the provider because customer satisfaction is a key component in effective implementation. Similarly, the external partner should have a school or district liaison with a level of authority to help troubleshoot implementation challenges as they arise.

**Establish Contract Provisions for What Happens When Services or Materials Are Unsatisfactory.** When a provider is not delivering its services as promised (e.g.,

trainers are of poor quality, curriculum materials are delivered late, professional development is not scheduled), the school may want more than assurances that the situation will be rectified as swiftly as possible. For example, being without curricular materials represents a significant problem because most schools face limited instructional days and tremendous pressure to meet accountability measures. Consequently, schools may want to incorporate financial and/or termination repercussions in the contract for certain failures of the provider to deliver adequate services. For example, a school may establish that the price of curricular materials not delivered by a certain time will decrease by X percent for every day the materials are late. The school and district should work with the district's attorney to draw up the best contract for their circumstances.

**Agree on Contract Provisions That Allow the School or District to Terminate the Partnership If the Provider Is Unable or Unwilling to Implement Services Effectively Across Time.**

If the school and the provider have tried other measures to improve implementation without success, they may want to consider terminating the relationship. Having already established provisions for such action will allow the relationship to end as smoothly as possible. (Some considerations for termination are included in Section 6, especially Table 1 on page 61.)

**Issue 8: Turnover of Leadership**

*Responses:*

**Seek Support From the District for Policies That Promote the Stability of School Leadership.** Some policies that could potentially enhance the success of implementation include the following:

- A district guarantee that it will hire a principal who supports the provider's service-delivery plans
- A district policy to offer longer contracts to principals who are experiencing success at particular schools
- A school or district policy that offers incentives to principals who remain at their schools and continue to be effective leaders
- A district provision for offering mentoring or peer coaching for new or inexperienced principals to integrate them into the culture and practices of the school and district

**Build Internal Capacity.** One way to counter the negative and potentially crippling effects of leadership turnover is to insulate the reform by embedding it as much as possible in the fabric of school operations. During implementation, the provider should focus as much as possible on building the internal capacity of staff to use

new strategies independently. Providers can contribute to internal capacity in many ways. One way is to promote staff leadership at various levels of school operations by training members of the school community to lead the improvement effort and conduct the provider's activities in the future. For example, a provider that helps teachers master some new instructional technique could train two lead teachers on its training methods. These lead teachers could help with the provider's intervention and then continue to work with existing and new teachers in the future. Another way that providers can contribute to internal capacity is to build reflection time and evaluation into all activities. A provider also can document for the school the methodologies that were implemented as well as the successes and lessons learned throughout the project. This kind of work increases understanding about the intervention among school staff and stakeholders. At the end of the day, teachers and others engage more deeply with the work, and they emerge with greater capacity to tackle other issues in the future.

### **Issue 9: Training New Teachers**

*Responses:*

**Specify Within the Contract How Incoming Teachers Will Be Trained After Implementation Has Begun.** One difficulty many schools face is teacher turnover. Because a provider's training schedule may occur in 2-year cycles, for example, contract provisions for training teachers coming in during the second year of implementation need to be discussed and agreed on.

**Build Capacity to Train New Teachers On-Site.** Some providers establish their final stage of teacher training as train-the-trainer sessions. In this way, either the school or the district develops the capacity to train incoming teachers. This option, though not available to schools in the early stages of implementation, reduces the cost of having the provider train all incoming teachers.

## **STEP 3: Establish an Evaluation Plan**

A plan to evaluate the provider's services should be established before work commences so that all parties are clear about the expectations and measures prior to implementation. Interventions and other improvement initiatives are part of the larger continuous improvement plan that is supported with federal funding (see page 45). The evaluation of any external partnership is critical to ensure quality, communicate expectations to partners, and incorporate whatever is learned during the implementation process into future iterations of the continuous improvement cycle.

The primary goal for any evaluation system should be to foster an environment of continuous improvement. The evaluation data should be used by the school, district, and provider to review and renew—on an ongoing basis—the approaches for improving student learning. This emphasis on ongoing data-driven decision making should lie at the heart of any evaluation strategy. Evaluation mechanisms also play an important role in the way the school is held accountable by the district or state. Evaluation of students, teachers, and schools has become commonplace with the demands for greater accountability within education.

A school that is implementing new services is likely to be part of an improvement plan that sets forth goals for the school, establishes measures of success, and specifies rewards for meeting the goals or consequences for falling short. Any evaluation of the success of a provider's services needs to be embedded in, or aligned with, this wider improvement plan. The primary question of the evaluation should be the following: Is adopting this provider's services helping the school make progress toward its goals, especially regarding student learning outcomes?

Progress toward academic goals will likely be a long-term process, so you need to find intermediate measures of progress. Two important categories of progress are worth noting. First, develop medium-term benchmarks for measuring progress in improving student outcomes (e.g., a school with a 3-year goal for improving students' reading ability could establish annual targets as medium-term benchmarks). Second, evaluate how well you are implementing the provider's approach. This evaluation of "process" can alert you to problems early on, allowing time for adjustments.

Keep in mind that evaluation of a provider's services should be ongoing, not a once-a-year assessment of certain quantifiable outcomes. Ongoing evaluation and communication regarding the evaluation are vital to ensuring that implementation and outcomes stay on track. This ongoing approach will prevent a school, district, or provider from potentially being surprised by a final evaluation that denotes unmet goals or unsatisfactory services. Schools and providers should work together to design strategies for ongoing feedback. These strategies might include the following:

- Immediate evaluations of particular training sessions or on-site consulting visits
- Regular debriefings between school leaders and provider staff
- Time in regular staff meetings to discuss staff impressions of the provider's services
- Structured midyear reviews of progress



### **TOOL 9: School or District Evaluation of Provider Services (see page 91)**

Tool 9 offers a template for evaluating the quality of the services that the provider is delivering. Some providers have their own evaluation forms; in such cases, Tool 9 can be used as a checklist to ensure that the provider’s form addresses all the issues important to you.

Providers also may want to guide the school in correctly implementing their services. More than likely, the provider working with a school will have its own methods of assessing the school’s progress toward implementation. As in the case of the school’s evaluation of the provider, the provider’s assessment of implementation should be ongoing—not just a year-end judgment.



### **TOOL 10: Provider Evaluation of School or District Implementation (see page 100)**

Tool 10 offers a set of questions to help the provider assess the school or district’s progress toward implementation. (Schools or districts also may use this tool as a self-assessment of their progress.) Providers may want to guide this process and have their own materials for doing so, but this tool will help you understand the ways that implementation might be judged.

For more information on evaluation, see Box 7.

#### **Box 7. Suggested Resources on Evaluation**

- [Designing an Evaluation: Methodological Approach and Sampling](#) (2002)
- [“Eight Smooth Steps: Solid Footwork Makes Evaluation of Staff Development Programs a Song”](#) (2003)
- [Evaluation Matters: Getting the Information You Need From Your Evaluation](#) (2014)
- *Handbook of Qualitative Research* (5th ed.; Sage Publications, 2017)
- *Program Evaluation: Alternative Approaches and Practical Guidelines* (4th ed.; Allyn and Bacon, 2017)
- *Program Evaluation Theory and Practice: A Comprehensive Guide* (2nd ed.; Guilford Press, 2017)
- [Program Evaluation Toolkit](#) (n.d.)
- *Qualitative Research and Evaluation Methods* (4th ed.; Sage Publications, 2014)



## SECTION 6: Planning for the Future

Although setting the basic terms of the relationship and the initial plan for implementation will naturally occupy most of your attention in the beginning stages of the partnership, it is never too early to begin taking a longer view. An initial question is simply the term of the contract: For how long are you planning to work together, at least initially? Then, how do you envision your relationship evolving across time? If all goes well, what might happen next? This guide's premise is that good upfront planning and ongoing communication can help make partnerships work. But be sure to consider in advance how you will proceed if the partnership does not meet the needs of the school, district, or provider.

### STEP 1: Reshape the Relationship After the Natural End of the Contract

Most providers offer a package of services that change across time. For example, the first year of implementation might include several days of inservice training for teachers, site visits to other schools implementing similar services, and multiple on-site consulting visits by the provider's staff. In subsequent years, the provider might expect to devote fewer days to these activities. A proposed trajectory is vital for schools, and it should be a focus of the negotiations of the provider's package of services (see Section 4 on page 39).

Hopefully, you have selected a provider that intends to build the capacity of your school to the point where, eventually, few or no provider services are needed. Thus, clearly defined next steps beyond the length of the initial contract may not be addressed. Although an ongoing partnership beyond the original contract might not be necessary, addressing the possibility of future relationships during the original contract negotiation is a good idea. Assuming the partnership goes well in the early years, what are your expectations about the longer term? What additional services might you want to consider?

For some possible scenarios worth considering, see Box 8. All these options should be explored with the assistance of the school or district attorney.

**Box 8. Alternatives for Long-Term Relationships Between Schools and Providers**

*Consider the following alternatives for continuing a relationship with an external provider.*

**School Self-Sufficiency.** Schools using a provider’s services ultimately will become self-sufficient (i.e., not require additional intervention from the provider). They will gain the capacity to train new staff members in the school’s approaches and revise the school’s program across time to meet new needs. The provider’s assistance will gradually shift toward efforts to build the school’s capacities in these areas.

**Networking Relationships.** Schools using a particular provider’s services will become largely self-sufficient, as described previously. But they will continue to be part of a “family” of schools using this particular provider—attending conferences, receiving newsletters and updates, and networking formally and informally with peers engaged in similar reforms.

**Continued Services.** The provider will continue to provide services to the school or district, either continuing work already done or by doing work in new areas of school and district operations. Possibilities include continued professional development for new staff; updating professional development for existing staff; on-site and off-site consulting, coaching, and troubleshooting; and assistance in revising the school or district’s approaches across time to meet new circumstances or achieve new goals.

**STEP 2: Sustain the Work**

All these efforts during implementation will be essentially wasted if they cannot be maintained. In our experience, the inability to embed successful sustainability strategies into the implementation and develop a long-term plan is the root cause of efforts that cannot be maintained. Throughout this guide, we consistently emphasize capacity building and leadership continuity as critical elements for long-term and lasting success. Similarly, a steady focus on the needs identified in the comprehensive needs assessment and the performance of consistently underserved subgroups is critical for continued effectiveness and efficient resource use. Lastly, keeping yourself apprised of your state’s schedule for revising school evaluation criteria will allow you to anticipate potential changes in funding that might affect any long-term partnerships or projects.

**STEP 3: Terminate Partnerships That Do Not Meet Expectations**

The purpose of this guide is to help schools, districts, and providers begin a partnership on sound footing and maintain a healthy relationship across time. Striving for clarity and

communication at all points in the relationship can go a long way toward avoiding some problems, revealing other problems early, and finding appropriate resolution. Still, no agreement would be complete without some forethought about the possibility that despite best efforts, the partnership might not satisfy everyone’s needs adequately. What will happen after repeated efforts to troubleshoot have failed?

Two components of the initial partnership agreement can help make these difficult situations easier to handle. First, the parties should agree upfront on the grounds under which the parties might decide to end the partnership. Some typical conditions for the early termination of an agreement are listed in Table 1.

**Table 1. Potential Grounds for Early Termination**

Potential grounds initiated by the school or district	Potential grounds initiated by the provider
Failure of the school to achieve results anticipated in a given period of time	Failure of the school to implement the provider’s services faithfully in a given period of time
Chronic unsatisfactory ratings of the provider’s services in evaluations	Failure of the district to provide resources or make policy changes deemed necessary for successful implementation
Any material violation of the contract, gross negligence, willful misconduct, or fraudulent misrepresentation	Any material violation of the contract, gross negligence, willful misconduct, or fraudulent misrepresentation
A change in policy or law or a court decision that makes implementation of the provider’s services impossible	A change in policy or law or a court decision that makes implementation of the provider’s services impossible
Insolvency or bankruptcy of the provider	Loss of accreditation or other sanction applied to the school

The situations in Table 1 are all worst-case scenarios. In reality, grounds for early termination would be invoked only in extreme circumstances when all efforts to fix the problem have been tried and fallen short. During contract negotiations, language regarding early termination should be explored with the assistance of the school or district’s attorney.

Beyond agreeing on the grounds for early termination, consider how the parties will wrap up their relationship in such an event. Some issues involved in a wrap-up are as follows:

- How any final payments due to the provider will be calculated and handled
- How any equipment or funds loaned to the school by the provider will be returned or repaid
- How the parties will handle communication of the end of the partnership to the outside world

Keep in mind that early termination is a rare occurrence. Of the thousands of schools that have hired external providers, most maintain their relationships as planned.



## CONCLUSION

The questions raised in this guide may make external partnerships seem overwhelmingly complicated. There are multiple concerns to raise with the other party, multiple questions to ask, and multiple uncertainties to clarify. Yet the lessons from those who have engaged in similar partnerships are straightforward: the greater the level of clarity that parties can achieve in advance, the fewer the problems that will arise later. The more communication that parties can maintain over the long haul, the more likely the parties will be able to resolve the inevitable challenges that will arise.

Carrying out the activities outlined in this guide can ensure the fostering of this complex relationship by helping schools, districts, and providers set out with their eyes open, arming them with a vast array of tools to help set up a solid foundation for the partnership. With upfront clarity about the destination and the route to get there, as well as ongoing communication about how the effort is progressing, these relationships have a chance to make real improvements in student learning.

Lastly, it is important to keep in the front of the mind the goal of any school or district improvement: better educational outcomes for students and those who are invested in working toward their success. Ensuring that you and your partner share this goal will go a long way in smoothing out competing priorities that may arise during the partnership. Remembering that the ultimate goal of any partnership is to help students can ensure that all actions taken both efficiently and effectively drive toward this north star.



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## TOOLKIT



### TOOL 1: Request for Proposal (RFP) Worksheet

*Directions:* Respond to each question. Members of the selection team might want to respond to these questions individually before reaching consensus on the final version of the RFP. After completing this tool, convert the information into a more formal document.

#### 1. What are your needs?

Write your needs as determined by the needs assessment process (e.g., low graduation rates among groups of students, high teacher turnover, poor comprehension skills in fourth grade). These needs should be your highest priorities. If your school or district is part of a coalition, consider whether these needs are shared or particular to your school or district.

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#### 2. What are your requirements for proposal submission, cost, timeline, and delivery of services?

**Proposal Submission.** Write your requirements for submitting a proposal, including due date, format in which proposals must be submitted, and information on how providers should submit (e.g., mail, e-mail).

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**Cost.** Write your expectations in terms of direct costs. How much are you willing to spend in hiring an external provider? In addition to the actual cost of the provider’s package of services, how much are you willing to pay for direct costs related to implementation (e.g., substitute teachers, materials, conference fees, technology)?

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**Timeline.** Write your expectations for getting the work accomplished. When do you expect the partnership to begin and end? Are you interested in renewing the contract if both parties agree and see a need to do so?

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**Delivery of Services.** Write any special considerations related to the delivery of services (e.g., rural schools that are physically isolated may want to ensure that electronic communication is a major component of the provider’s services; schools that have students with special needs will want to ensure that materials are available in appropriate formats).

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**3. What outcomes do you expect as a result of hiring an external provider?**

Write the outcomes you expect by hiring an external provider. These outcomes should be directly related to your needs and measurable. For example, you might include the following as an outcome: “ESL student academic improvement, as measured by not only achievement test scores but also samples of student work, grades, and teacher observation.” Another example might be as follows: “Science teachers leading classroom discussions more effectively elicit student engagement, as measured by peer observation and student surveys.” You also may consider soliciting input from potential providers for outcome measures based on their approach and strategies.

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**4. What services do you want the provider to deliver?**

Write the type of services you would like the provider to deliver. For example, you might want the provider to lead a summer professional development workshop with follow-up during the year. Alternatively, you might want the provider to deliver one-on-one coaching to science teachers. If you would like the provider to suggest a package of services or if you are unsure of the best approach, you may garner more creative and robust responses with an open-ended request; be sure to indicate your issues, goals, time frame, and budget so that potential providers offer services that meet your needs.

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**5. What are your selection criteria?**

**Prioritized List of Quality Characteristics.** Examine the five characteristics of high-quality provider services and modify, rank, or eliminate them from the list. For example, you might be especially concerned that the provider’s services are customized to your unique circumstances but not concerned that they be long term (e.g., you already have a long-term improvement plan, and this is one piece of that plan). Regardless of how you prioritize these characteristics, you should state clearly your needs and desires for each category. For

example, if you want a provider to customize its services to embrace the local culture, describe this need here.

- **Aligned.** The proposed services are aligned with the school’s established goals.
- **Long Term.** The proposed services are part of a long-term strategy for school improvement.
- **Customized.** The proposed services are customized to meet the specific needs of the school or district, and the provider has a viable plan to get buy-in from key stakeholders.
- **Evidence Based.** The proposed services are based on the best available research.
- **Capacity Building.** The proposed services will build the school or district’s capacity to carry out similar work in the future. Also, a potential provider should possess sufficient capacity to successfully deliver on the scope of work.

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**Type of Assistance Needed.** Write any selection criteria related to the type of assistance you need. Consider intensity (comprehensive versus targeted help), focus (content versus process), and degree of prescriptiveness (e.g., if experienced faculty would not be receptive to a prescriptive approach, you might write the following: “The provider will help teachers develop effective strategies—not tell them what to do”). If your school or district is part of a coalition, how does this assistance look at each site in the coalition? What individual and group needs need to be addressed separately?

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**Beliefs and Values.** Write any selection criteria related to your school or district’s beliefs and values. What does your school believe is important in terms of teaching and learning? What is the school’s vision for student success? How collaborative is the school culture?

How open are faculty members to trying new approaches? For example, if the faculty believes in multiple assessments, you might write the following: “The provider will help teachers develop multiple ways of measuring student progress.” If the faculty is uncomfortable with peer observations, you might write the following: “The provider will build trust among the faculty before introducing peer observations.”

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**Customized List of Selection Criteria.** After reviewing your prioritized list of quality characteristics, determine your customized list of selection criteria based on type of assistance needed and your school’s beliefs and values. (You will use this list in Tool 3.)

Criterion A: \_\_\_\_\_

Criterion B: \_\_\_\_\_

Criterion C: \_\_\_\_\_

Criterion D: \_\_\_\_\_

Criterion E: \_\_\_\_\_



## TOOL 2: Prospective Provider Information Sheet

*Directions:* Complete the following worksheet for each provider that you are considering.

### Part A: General Information

Company or Organization
Contact Person
Contact Information
Website
References
Reference Notes
Research or Evidence Supporting the Provider's Approach

**Part B: Key Questions to Ask the Provider**

Write your questions in the following chart.<sup>2</sup> Then write the provider’s response to each question.

Question	Provider’s response
1.	
2.	
3.	
4.	
5.	
6.	

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<sup>2</sup> Sample questions: (1) Our students are required to take a statewide assessment. How will you align your services with this requirement? (2) Can you describe the research that supports your services? In addition to conducting in-house research on the effectiveness of your approach, do you have independent research that confirms your findings? (3) How do you plan to assess our teachers’ readiness for your services? (4) Describe past situations where you have modified your services to fit the unique needs of a client.

**Part C: Additional Thoughts About the Provider**

Potential benefits	Potential drawbacks

**Additional Notes:**

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### TOOL 3: Prospective Provider Rating Worksheet

*Directions:* Use the following tool to rate how each provider fares after research, initial conversations, and reference checks are completed. Rate the provider on the following scale:

**Scale for rating prospective providers**

- **No evidence.** The provider does not indicate that its services have this characteristic.
- **Evidence.** The provider indicates that its services have this characteristic.
- **Strong evidence.** The provider provides strong evidence that its services have this characteristic.

Company or Organization: \_\_\_\_\_

Contact Person: \_\_\_\_\_

**1. Does the provider offer services that have the five quality characteristics?**

<b>Aligned With Established Goals</b>	No evidence	Evidence	Strong evidence
<b>Part of a Long-Term Strategy</b>	No evidence	Evidence	Strong evidence
<b>Customized</b>	No evidence	Evidence	Strong evidence
<b>Evidence Based</b>	No evidence	Evidence	Strong evidence
<b>Capacity Building</b>	No evidence	Evidence	Strong evidence

**2. Does the provider offer services meeting the selection criteria that are unique to your school? Please refer to Tool 1, Question 5 (page 73) for your customized list of selection criteria relating to type of assistance needed and beliefs and values.**

Criterion A: \_\_\_\_\_

No evidence                      Evidence                      Strong evidence

Criterion B: \_\_\_\_\_

No evidence                      Evidence                      Strong evidence

Criterion C: \_\_\_\_\_

No evidence                      Evidence                      Strong evidence

Criterion D: \_\_\_\_\_  
No evidence                      Evidence                      Strong evidence

Criterion E: \_\_\_\_\_  
No evidence                      Evidence                      Strong evidence

**3. Does the provider have the right balance of process and content for your needs?**

No evidence                      Evidence                      Strong evidence

**4. Do you and the provider agree about the outcomes you expect from the partnership?**

No evidence                      Evidence                      Strong evidence

**5. Does the provider have a strategy for evaluating whether these outcomes are met?**

No evidence                      Evidence                      Strong evidence

**6. Are the provider's services cost-effective?**

No evidence                      Evidence                      Strong evidence

**7. Do you think you would work well with this provider, and do you think other staff members from your school or district would work well with this provider?**

No evidence                      Evidence                      Strong evidence

**8. Other question:**

\_\_\_\_\_  
\_\_\_\_\_  
\_\_\_\_\_

No evidence                      Evidence                      Strong evidence

**9. Other question:**

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No evidence

Evidence

Strong evidence

**Additional Notes:**

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## TOOL 4: Provider Services and Materials Questionnaire

*Directions:* Use this tool to assess what you already know about a provider’s services and materials and what information you still need to gather. You also can use this tool as a comparative checklist if the provider presents you with a draft contract outlining its proposed services. Using this checklist should reveal any areas of uncertainty or misunderstanding about the proposed package of services.

### Part A: Package of Services the Provider Will Supply

Do you have information about the following?	Yes	No	N/A
External provider strategy to ensure alignment between state or district standards and provider services (including shifts likely based on published state evaluation criteria revision schedules)			
External provider assessment strategy, including how the provider uses the results of standardized tests in planning curriculum and instruction			
Specific changes required in curriculum, instructional practices, scheduling, and class structure			
Period of time in which on-site consulting is provided (e.g., length of the contract)			
Individuals who provide the on-site consulting (background and contact information)			
Options if the school is not satisfied with the consulting			
Types of ongoing professional development facilitated (e.g., expert coaching, peer coaching, action research, group reflection, individual reflection)			
Types of professional development sessions			
Flexibility to tailor professional development to the school			
Training for those in leadership positions			
Process for providing professional development to new staff at the school site once implementation has begun			
Forms of communication			
Frequency of communication			

Do you have information about the following?	Yes	No	N/A
Provider’s primary contact person			
National, regional, and local opportunities for meetings between faculty from different schools using same services			
How the provider will support sustainability of improvement efforts			
How the provider’s services will support the continuous improvement cycle.			
Who “owns” the processes and materials developed by the provider for the school or district			
Other services:			

**Part B: Package of Materials the Provider Will Supply**

Do you have information about the following?	Yes	No	N/A
Subject areas and grade levels (if any) for which curricular materials are provided			
Availability of special materials and tips for modification of curricular materials for students with special needs			
Scheduled delivery of materials, assurance that all materials will be delivered on time, and person to contact if materials do not arrive on time			
Materials to guide implementation of schoolwide strategies (e.g., common planning time, class scheduling, looping, school governance, community involvement)			
Materials to guide the school and district in self-assessment			
Equipment or materials required by the provider but not included in the package of materials or services (e.g., computers, networking capabilities, laboratory equipment)			
Other materials included in the price of the services:			



## TOOL 5: Gap Analysis

*Directions:* Use this tool to record any gaps between your school improvement approach and what is offered through the external provider’s package of services. As described in detail in the guide, gaps could arise from the school’s needs, district and state standards and requirements, or values of the school community that are not addressed adequately by the provider. The provider may use this tool to respond to the school’s analysis. The provider also may discuss its strategies to address the school’s needs, requirements, and values; in addition, the provider may cite reasons why it cannot address the school’s concerns.

### Potential Areas of School Needs, Standards, Requirements, and Values

- |                                    |   |
|------------------------------------|---|
| Assessment strategies              | Needs assessment                          |
| Classroom management               | Parent engagement                         |
| Culture building                   | Professional learning communities         |
| Curriculum components              | Root-cause analysis                       |
| Data analysis                      | School governance                         |
| Equity training                    | Second language learners                  |
| Family and community involvement   | Social and emotional learning             |
| High expectations                  | Special population needs                  |
| Instructional methods and delivery | Teacher recruitment, induction, mentoring |
| Leadership development             | Use of technology                         |

<p>What gaps exist between the school’s needs and the services offered by the provider? <i>(To be filled in by the school)</i></p>	<p>Can the provider’s services be adapted to fill the gaps? If so, how? <i>(To be filled in by the provider)</i></p>
<p><i>Example: Our fourth-grade students’ scores (on average) are at the 36th percentile in reading comprehension. We need a program that gets these students up to grade level.</i></p>	<p><i>Example: We have investigated several reading programs and found two that have demonstrated results with your target population and also fit with our service delivery model. Let’s set up a meeting next week to discuss.</i></p>



## TOOL 6: Provider Costs Questionnaire

*Directions:* Read the questions in the left column and write the provider costs in the right column. This tool helps schools and districts get a handle on the costs of a provider by guiding them through a set of questions concerning the costs of general assistance, consulting, professional development, materials, and other services. It also provides space for providers to note additional staffing, equipment, and other needs not included in the contract. (Note: Different providers may break down their costs into different categories. This breakdown will depend on the nature and scope of the work as well as the business procedures of the provider.)

### Part A: General Provider Costs

School or district query	Category	Cost estimate
What is the total cost of the package of services?	<b>Total cost</b>	\$ _____
What is included in this fee?	<b>Notes:</b>	
How does the provider break down the overall costs?	<b>Notes:</b>	
What is the breakdown of annual costs by category? <ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>Will these costs change during the course of the agreement?</li> <li>If the provider’s costs exceed your target budget, ask the provider for suggestions to reduce the bottom line.</li> </ul>	_____ _____ _____ _____ _____ <b>Notes:</b>	\$ _____ \$ _____ \$ _____ \$ _____ \$ _____
What categories of direct costs are required or encouraged in implementation but not included in the package of services? <ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>Put a checkmark by all that apply.</li> <li>Estimate the approximate costs for each category.</li> </ul> (In some cases, the provider will be able to fill in costs; in other cases, costs will vary by district and should be estimated by the school or district after the provider has indicated whether the item is necessary or preferred.)	<b>Additional Staff:</b> <i>(Please specify position in space provided.)</i> _____ _____ _____	\$ _____ \$ _____ \$ _____
	<b>Additional technology or equipment</b>	\$ _____
	<b>Teacher stipends for professional development sessions</b>	\$ _____
	<b>Wages of substitutes for teachers in professional development sessions</b>	\$ _____

School or district query	Category	Cost estimate
	Conferences	\$ _____
	Faculty travel (e.g., for professional development, school visits)	\$ _____
	Additional student field trips	\$ _____
	Conferences	\$ _____
	<b>Total Direct Costs Not Included in Price</b>	\$ _____

**Part B: Provider Costs for On-Site Consulting and Technical Assistance**

School or district query	Costs or additional information
<p>Is there a daily rate for on-site consultation? If so, what is it?</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>Does the rate differ depending on the experience level of the consultant or for any other reason?</li> <li>Note: Not all providers will develop their budgets in this way.</li> </ul>	
Does the rate for on-site consulting change if more visits are needed than originally planned?	
Are travel expenses for consultants included in the package of services or are they billed separately to the school or district as they are incurred?	
Does the provider have a policy to make cost-conscious travel arrangements when possible (e.g., make travel arrangements in advance)?	
Does the provider comply with government per-diem rates?	
What, if any, charges for off-site consulting services are not included in the package of services (e.g., telephone bills, e-mail accounts)?	

**Part C: Provider Costs for Professional Development**

School or district query	Costs or additional information
Break down the price for professional development sessions (e.g., training, materials, meals). Note what is not included (e.g., lodging, travel) in the price of the sessions.	

**Part D: Provider Costs for Materials**

School or district query	Costs or additional information
If applicable, how are costs for curricular materials calculated (e.g., per pupil)? Please provide specific details.	
If applicable, note what other materials (e.g., implementation guides, student progress logs, rubrics) are provided as well as their total costs per school.	

**Part E: Other Provider Costs**

School or district query	Costs or additional information
Note any other costs of which the school or district should be aware.	
Would there be any savings on services or materials if the school could “cluster” with other schools using the provider’s services? Please provide specific details.	



## TOOL 7: Provider Preferences for Supportive School-Level Policies

*Directions:* In the left column, the provider should identify school-level policies that are needed or useful for implementation. In the middle column, the school should describe whether these policies are in place for each area identified by the provider. In the right column, both parties should address the differences between what the provider requests and what the school can offer. As a start, refer to the following list of school-level policies.

### Sample List of School-Level Policies That Are Potentially Useful for Implementation

- |  |   |
|--|---|
| Budget authority                             | Leadership commitment                       |
| Evaluation procedures                        | Materials purchasing                        |
| Flexible scheduling                          | Staff assignment                            |
| Funds available for professional development | Time available for professional development |

<b>School-level policies preferred by provider</b> <i>(To be filled in by the provider)</i>	<b>Existing school policies</b> <i>(To be filled in by the school)</i>	<b>Resolution</b> <i>(To be agreed on by each party)</i>
<i>Example: Provider would like to schedule common planning time for grade-level teams three times a week.</i>	<i>Example: We currently have common planning time scheduled once a week.</i>	<i>Example: School has the authority to change schedule and will do so.</i>



## TOOL 8: Provider Preferences for Supportive District-Level Policies

*Directions:* In the left column, the provider should identify district-level policies that are needed or useful for implementation. In the middle column, the district should describe whether these policies are in place for each area identified by the provider. In the right column, both parties should address the differences between what the provider requests and what the district can offer. As a start, refer to the following list of district-level policies.

### Sample List of District-Level Policies That Are Potentially Useful for Implementation

- |  |   |
|--|---|
| Alignment with other initiatives             | Leadership commitment                       |
| Budget authority                             | Leadership stability                        |
| Clear lines of authority                     | Materials purchasing                        |
| Evaluation procedures                        | Staff assignment                            |
| Flexible scheduling                          | Time available for professional development |
| Funds available for professional development |   |

District-level policies preferred by provider <i>(To be filled in by the provider)</i>	Existing district policies <i>(To be filled in by the district)</i>	Resolution <i>(To be agreed on by each party)</i>
<i>Example: Provider would like to schedule four days of professional development training sessions during the year.</i>	<i>Current policy is for teachers to attend two days of district-led professional development.</i>	<i>District will waive school's attendance at district professional development days for first year of implementation.</i>



## TOOL 9: School or District Evaluation of Provider Services

*Directions:* This evaluation tool allows the school or district to evaluate provider services in seven categories: outcomes, staff, materials, professional development (ongoing), professional development (training sessions), networking opportunities, and other. In the left column, the school should circle the appropriate rating for the lists in each category. In the right column, the school should offer any comments or suggestions related to its ratings. (For example, the school or district evaluator may want to use examples to support the rating or make suggestions to change the quantity of services—a topic not explicitly included in rating the quality of a service.) Before each section is a rubric to help schools or districts rate each area. In addition, some sections conclude with a few “yes” or “no” questions; these questions provide an opportunity for comments as a means of gathering additional information.

### Part A: Outcomes of Provider Services

#### Rubric for rating outcomes of provider services

- 4:** Provider exceeded the expectations outlined during contract discussions.
- 3:** Provider met the expectations outlined during contract discussions.
- 2:** Provider made some progress but did not meet the expectations outlined during contract discussions. (Priority Area)
- 1:** Provider made little or no progress toward the expectations outlined during contract discussions. (Immediate Priority Area)

#### Rating of outcomes

*Rate the following outcomes using the above rubric.*

Overall learning environment:	4	3	2	1
Student achievement:	4	3	2	1
Student engagement:	4	3	2	1
Teacher engagement:	4	3	2	1
Changes in teacher practices:	4	3	2	1
Principal engagement:	4	3	2	1
Positive student behavior:	4	3	2	1
Parent support:	4	3	2	1
Central office support:	4	3	2	1
Superintendent support:	4	3	2	1
Community support:	4	3	2	1

#### Comments or suggestions

*Make any comments or suggestions in this space.*

**Part B: Provider Staff**

**Rubric for rating provider staff**

- 4:** All experiences were very positive. No significant improvements are needed in this area.
- 3:** Most experiences were positive. Only a few minor improvements are needed in this area.
- 2:** Some experiences were positive. Some fairly significant improvements could be made in this area. (Priority Area)
- 1:** Few or no experiences were positive. This area needs substantial change. (Immediate Priority Area)
- DK:** Don't Know. The evaluator does not have enough information or familiarity to rate this area.

**Rating of provider staff**

*Rate the following outcomes using the above rubric.*

Knowledge of services:	4	3	2	1	DK
Knowledge of school:	4	3	2	1	DK
Knowledge of district:	4	3	2	1	DK
Willingness to tailor services to school or district's individual needs:	4	3	2	1	DK
Availability for scheduled meetings:	4	3	2	1	DK
Availability for emergency meetings:	4	3	2	1	DK
Communications effectiveness:	4	3	2	1	DK
Communications timeliness:	4	3	2	1	DK
Relationship with school faculty or staff:	4	3	2	1	DK
Relationship with central office staff:	4	3	2	1	DK
Community support:	4	3	2	1	DK

**Comments or suggestions**

*Make any comments or suggestions in this space.*

**Part C: Materials**

<b>Rubric for rating materials</b>						
<b>4:</b>	The content of the material significantly contributed to improved teaching and learning. The format and language of the material was extremely clear and cohesive. The scope of the material was comprehensive without being overwhelming.					
<b>3:</b>	The content of the material contributed to improved teaching and learning. The format and language were fairly clear and cohesive. The material included all necessary components.					
<b>2:</b>	The content of the material contributed somewhat to improved teaching and learning. The format or language was confusing in parts. The material lacked a few topics or tools that would have been helpful. (Priority Area)					
<b>1:</b>	The content of the material did not contribute much to improved teaching and learning. The format and language were confusing throughout much of the material. The material lacked a number of topics or tools that would have been helpful. (Immediate Priority Area)					
<b>N/A:</b>	Not Applicable. This type of material was not used by the school or not provided by the external provider.					
<b>DK:</b>	Don't Know. The evaluator does not have enough information or familiarity to rate this area.					
<b>Rating of materials</b>				<b>Comments or suggestions</b>		
<i>Rate the following outcomes using the above rubric.</i>						
Informational literature:	4	3	2	1	N/A	DK
Curricular materials						
Overall:	4	3	2	1	N/A	DK
Language arts:	4	3	2	1	N/A	DK
Mathematics:	4	3	2	1	N/A	DK
Social studies:	4	3	2	1	N/A	DK
Science:	4	3	2	1	N/A	DK
Other:	4	3	2	1	N/A	DK
Other:	4	3	2	1	N/A	DK
Self-assessment guide:	4	3	2	1	N/A	DK
Other materials:	4	3	2	1	N/A	DK
				<i>Make any comments or suggestions in this space.</i>		

**Part D: Professional Development—Ongoing**

<b>Rubric for rating professional development—ongoing</b>	
<b>4:</b>	The purpose of, and directions for, the activity were explicitly and patiently explained. The activity was structured in a way that staff could directly use the results to improve teaching. The activity took place in a fully supportive environment.
<b>3:</b>	The purpose of, and directions for, the activity were adequately explained. The activity included some structure to help staff tie the results to improved teaching. The activity took place in a generally supportive environment.
<b>2:</b>	The directions for the activity were explained with little or no attention given to the purpose of the activity. The activity was not structured in a way that staff could directly use the results to improve teaching. The activity was done with little ongoing support from the provider or school leadership. (Priority Area)
<b>1:</b>	Neither the directions nor the purpose was adequately explained. Staff received no guidance in using the activity to improve teaching. The activity had no ongoing support from the provider or school leadership. (Immediate Priority Area)
<b>N/A:</b>	Not Applicable. This type of activity was not used by the school or not provided by the provider.
<b>DK:</b>	Don't Know. The evaluator does not have enough information or familiarity to rate this area.

<b>Rating of professional development—ongoing</b>	<b>Comments or suggestions</b>
<i>Rate the following outcomes using the above rubric.</i>	<i>Make any comments or suggestions in this space.</i>
Use of peer coaching:                    4   3   2   1   N/A   DK	
Use of mentoring relationships:        4   3   2   1   N/A   DK	
Use of group reflection or sharing:    4   3   2   1   N/A   DK	
Use of personal journal reflection:    4   3   2   1   N/A   DK	
Use of other self-assessment tools:    4   3   2   1   N/A   DK	

**Questions for Professional Development—Ongoing**

*Check the appropriate response and make comments as necessary.*

1. Does the provider assess teachers' use of learned professional development skills in the classroom? Yes      No

*Comments:* \_\_\_\_\_

\_\_\_\_\_

\_\_\_\_\_

\_\_\_\_\_

\_\_\_\_\_

2. Do you think this type of assessment is (would be) helpful? Yes      No

*Why or why not?* \_\_\_\_\_  
\_\_\_\_\_  
\_\_\_\_\_  
\_\_\_\_\_  
\_\_\_\_\_

3. Does the provider evaluate if the professional development skills learned by teachers produce increases in student achievement? Yes      No

*Comments:* \_\_\_\_\_  
\_\_\_\_\_  
\_\_\_\_\_  
\_\_\_\_\_  
\_\_\_\_\_

4. Do you think this type of evaluation is (would be) helpful? Yes      No

*Why or why not?* \_\_\_\_\_  
\_\_\_\_\_  
\_\_\_\_\_  
\_\_\_\_\_  
\_\_\_\_\_

**Part E: Professional Development—Training Sessions**

**Rubric for professional development—training sessions**

- 4:** All expectations were met. No significant improvements are needed in this area.
- 3:** Most expectations were met. Only a few minor changes or improvements are necessary in this area.
- 2:** Some expectations were met. There is some room for change or improvement in this area. (Priority Area)
- 1:** Few or no expectations were met. A significant degree of change or improvement is needed. (Immediate Priority Area)
- N/A:** Not Applicable. This type of activity was not used by the school or not provided by the provider.
- DK:** Don't Know. The evaluator does not have enough information or familiarity to rate this area.

**Rating of professional development—training sessions**

*Rate the following outcomes using the above rubric.*

Relevance of topics:	4	3	2	1	N/A	DK
Knowledge of trainers:	4	3	2	1	N/A	DK
Time use effectiveness:	4	3	2	1	N/A	DK
Appropriateness of session length:	4	3	2	1	N/A	DK
Personal reflection time:	4	3	2	1	N/A	DK

**Comments or suggestions**

*Make any comments or suggestions in this space.*

**Part F: Networking Opportunities**

**Rubric for rating networking opportunities**

- 4:** All expectations were met. No significant improvements are needed in this area.
- 3:** Most expectations were met. Only a few minor changes or improvements are necessary in this area.
- 2:** Some expectations were met. There is some room for change or improvement in this area. (Priority Area)
- 1:** Few or no expectations were met. A significant degree of change or improvement is needed. (Immediate Priority Area)
- N/A:** "Not Applicable." This type of activity was not used by the school or not provided by the provider.
- DK:** "Don't Know." The evaluator does not have enough information or familiarity to rate this area.

**Rating of networking opportunities**

*Rate the following outcomes using the above rubric.*

Range of people (e.g., different grade levels, positions, geographic areas) invited to networking opportunities:	4	3	2	1	N/A	DK
Quantity of face-to-face networking opportunities:	4	3	2	1	N/A	DK
Range of communication opportunities with other teachers or schools:	4	3	2	1	N/A	DK
Effectiveness of communication opportunities with other teachers or schools:	4	3	2	1	N/A	DK
Quantity of communication opportunities with other teachers or schools:	4	3	2	1	N/A	DK

**Comments or suggestions**

*Make any comments or suggestions in this space.*

### Questions for Networking Opportunities

Check the appropriate response and comment as necessary.

1. Do you feel connected with other teachers or schools using this provider's services?                      Yes              No

*Comments:* \_\_\_\_\_  
\_\_\_\_\_  
\_\_\_\_\_  
\_\_\_\_\_  
\_\_\_\_\_

2. Do you think this connection is important?                      Yes              No

*Why or why not?* \_\_\_\_\_  
\_\_\_\_\_  
\_\_\_\_\_  
\_\_\_\_\_  
\_\_\_\_\_

**Part G: Other Items**

**Rubric for rating other items**

- 4:** All expectations were met. No significant improvements are needed in this area.
- 3:** Most expectations were met. Only a few minor changes or improvements are necessary in this area.
- 2:** Some expectations were met. There is some room for change or improvement in this area. (Priority Area)
- 1:** Few or no expectations were met. A significant degree of change or improvement is needed. (Immediate Priority Area)
- N/A:** Not Applicable. This type of activity or material was not used by the school or not provided by the provider.
- DK:** Don't Know. The evaluator does not have enough information or familiarity to rate this area.

**Rating of Other Items**

*This section may include any specific expectations that the school listed in Tool 1.*

Item: _____	4	3	2	1	N/A	DK
_____						
_____						
Item: _____	4	3	2	1	N/A	DK
_____						
_____						
Item: _____	4	3	2	1	N/A	DK

**Comments or Suggestions**

*Make any comments or suggestions for other topics in this space.*



## TOOL 10: Provider Evaluation of School or District Implementation

Directions: The provider should use this tool to assess the school or district’s success in implementing provider services. The tool includes several “areas of assessment,” which may apply to your particular partnership. There is room at the end to enter “other” areas not addressed in the tool. Note that several categories are provided for “student achievement by subgroup.” Fill in the subgroups that the school or provider wants to look at separately. Some examples include grade level, racial or ethnic group, gender, and English-speaking ability. (Note: Schools or districts also may wish to use this tool as a self-assessment of their progress.)

### Rubric for rating school or district implementation

- E: Excellent Progress.** The school or district is fully meeting expectations in this area. Continuing the tactics used and energy devoted to this area will allow the school or district to meet its goals on its identified time schedule.
- S: Satisfactory Progress.** The school or district is making progress in this area. Some changes in tactics or renewed vigor in efforts could ensure that the school or district will meet its goals on its identified time schedule.
- U: Unsatisfactory Progress.** The school or district is not meeting expectations in this area. The school or district should meet with the provider to determine possible reasons for this lack of progress and agree on a new approach for meeting expectations in the future.
- N: No Progress.** The school or district has made no progress in this area. This area should be an immediate priority for the school or district and the provider. A completely new strategy or more intensive services may be necessary to get this area on track.
- N/A: Not Applicable.** This area is not affected by the provider’s services.
- DK: Don’t Know.** The evaluator does not have enough information or familiarity to rate this area.

Area of assessment	Evidence used	Ranking (Circle appropriate ranking.)			Comments
		E	S	U	
Overall learning environment		N	N/A	DK	
Overall student achievement		N	N/A	DK	
Student achievement by subgroup: _____ _____ _____		N	N/A	DK	

Area of assessment	Evidence used	Ranking (Circle appropriate ranking.)			Comments
Student achievement by subgroup: _____ _____ _____		E	S	U	
		N	N/A	DK	
Student achievement by subgroup: _____ _____ _____		E	S	U	
		N	N/A	DK	
Student achievement by subgroup: _____ _____ _____		E	S	U	
		N	N/A	DK	
Fidelity to provider strategies (e.g., block scheduling, common planning time)		E	S	U	
		N	N/A	DK	
Fidelity to classroom instructional or assessment strategies		E	S	U	
		N	N/A	DK	
Fidelity to classroom management strategies		E	S	U	
		N	N/A	DK	
Fidelity to school governance strategies		E	S	U	
		N	N/A	DK	
Fidelity to parent or community involvement strategy		E	S	U	
		N	N/A	DK	
Student engagement		E	S	U	
		N	N/A	DK	
Teacher engagement		E	S	U	
		N	N/A	DK	

Area of assessment	Evidence used	Ranking (Circle appropriate ranking.)			Comments
Principal engagement		E	S	U	
		N	N/A	DK	
Professional development		E	S	U	
		N	N/A	DK	
Professional collaboration		E	S	U	
		N	N/A	DK	
Parent involvement		E	S	U	
		N	N/A	DK	
Stakeholder Engagement		E	S	U	
		N	N/A	DK	
Community involvement		E	S	U	
		N	N/A	DK	
Central office or superintendent support		E	S	U	
		N	N/A	DK	
School board support		E	S	U	
		N	N/A	DK	
Union support		E	S	U	
		N	N/A	DK	
Other:		E	S	U	
		N	N/A	DK	
Other:		E	S	U	
		N	N/A	DK	

Area of assessment	Evidence used	Ranking (Circle appropriate ranking.)			Comments
Other:		E	S	U	
		N	N/A	DK	
Other:		E	S	U	
		N	N/A	DK	
Other:		E	S	U	
		N	N/A	DK	

