

TOOLS

The preceding parts of this toolkit describe the steps that states can take to advance effective learning systems down to the school level. This section of the toolkit provides resources to help states implement these steps within their own unique contexts.

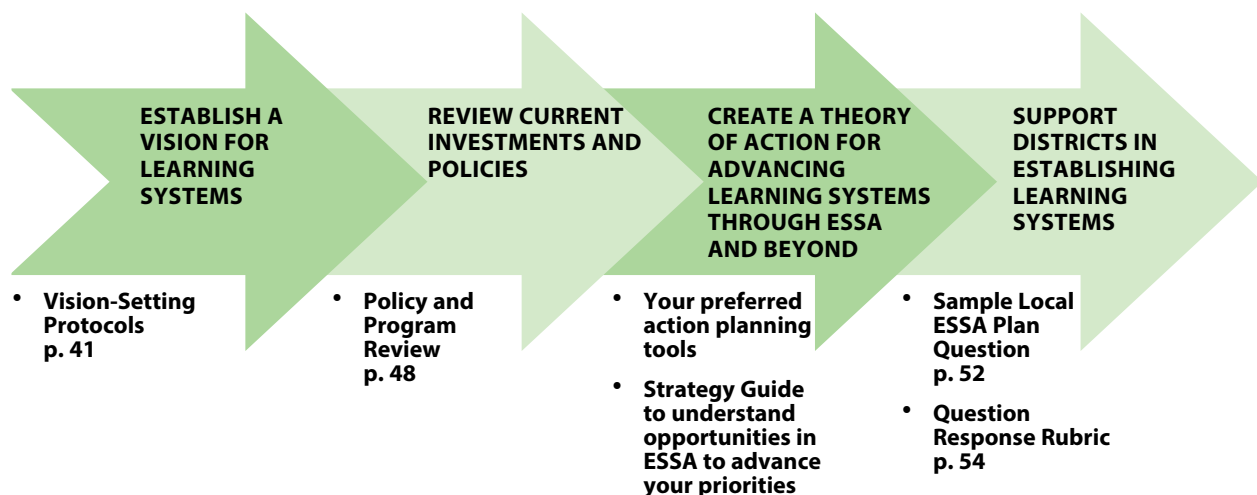
THE TOOLS INCLUDE:

VISION-SETTING PROTOCOLS: High-quality professional learning systems are anchored in a clear, compelling, and shared vision for what adult learning looks like at the school level. These protocols provide a process for articulating that definition and identifying how school, district, and state leadership and policies can each contribute to school-based systems.

PROGRAM AND POLICY REVIEW: State and district leaders may conduct an initiative analysis to understand how existing efforts and policies align with the state vision for professional learning. This analysis will help to identify potential opportunities as well as gaps you may want to address using federal funds through your ESSA state plan.

SAMPLE LOCAL PLAN QUESTION: In 2017, states will develop the local plan template that districts will need to complete to receive federal funds. This development process provides an important opportunity for states to lead districts in comprehensive, thoughtful planning to improve education systems and the professional learning that can support desired shifts at the local level. This toolkit includes a sample local plan question that states may adapt to help districts do this work. A thoughtful and detailed question (with response) provides the state with insight into district plans and allows the state to monitor progress. The ESSA plan guidance also allows the state to provide helpful feedback to the district so that intentions are more likely to result in improvement.

SUGGESTED SEQUENCE FOR USING TOOLS



TOOL

1

VISION-SETTING PROTOCOLS



This tool is designed to support a group in establishing a draft vision for systems of professional learning, and identifying state and district roles for supporting these systems. States can also use Tool 2: Policy and Program Review (p. 48) to determine how current investments align with the vision and where there may be gaps.

DEFINE HIGH-QUALITY PROFESSIONAL LEARNING AT THE SCHOOL LEVEL

Time: 45 - 90 minutes

Materials: Handout - State definitions of professional learning (pp. 44-46), chart paper, markers, tape, sticky notes

1. Ask each member of the group to write attributes of their definition of professional learning on self-adhesive “sticky notes,” one attribute or idea per note.
2. In groups of four or five, share the attributes on sticky notes, clustering similar ideas together.
3. Report similarities and record them on chart paper.
4. Use the federal definition of professional learning on p.14 to compare your own characteristics.
5. Alternatively (or, in addition, if time allows), review the Kentucky, Michigan, and Connecticut definitions of professional learning and note the similarities and differences.
6. Come to consensus on the key points to include in a definition of professional learning.
7. Invite a small group to craft the definition using the key points generated and bring it back to the next meeting for review and revision. The group can move on to the next vision-setting exercise in the same day if needed. During the discussion, be sure to consider what words may be confusing to others who don’t fully understand what you’re aiming to do around professional learning.
8. Encourage members to share the definition with stakeholders to seek feedback. It is important to acknowledge that stakeholders will not have the same depth of background knowledge and the opportunity to cultivate an understanding about the different terms that team members have experienced, so the task is not to seek their agreement, but rather to assess if the definition makes sense and to collect the questions it generates.

CREATE A CLEAR PICTURE OF WHAT THE DEFINITION LOOKS LIKE IN ACTION

Time: 1 - 2 hours of prep and 1 hour of facilitation

Materials: Handout - Sample definition in action

1. Based on the definition the group has developed, the group (or a subset) may develop a document, such as a chart, narrative or anecdote, that shows what the definition looks like in a school. Try to describe the experience of educators in a school with a high-quality learning system aligned to the definition. If the group decides to create a chart, one column might list what the vision for professional learning looks like, while a second column explains what it is not. Regardless of the format, the document might address:
 - How frequently educators meet to discuss and improve their practice;
 - How educators decide what to focus on;
 - The qualifications of those who are leading professional learning, and how they were trained and supported;
 - How educators give and receive feedback;
 - How educators know whether their efforts are resulting in improvements in practice and student learning;
 - What a professional learning conversation might sound like;
 - How leadership has created a culture that supports learning and improvement.
2. Share the document draft with the planning team and additional key stakeholders, either through written feedback or in person.
3. Revise based on feedback. If needed, facilitate a call or in-person meeting to reconcile feedback.
4. If time allows, we recommend engaging additional stakeholders in discussing the second iteration of the document.
5. Prepare to publish the document more widely so that it serves as a concrete picture of what the vision would look like in practice. In preparation, consider:
 - How can we ensure that all staff share a common vision and understanding of quality professional learning?
 - Who are our best champions and messengers?

CLARIFY HOW EACH LEVEL OF THE EDUCATION SYSTEM — SCHOOL, LOCAL, AND STATE — CAN UNIQUELY CONTRIBUTE TO HIGH-QUALITY LEARNING SYSTEMS

Time: 90 - 120 minutes

Materials: Handout – “Essential Roles in our Professional Learning Ecosystem” graphic organizer (p. 47), chart paper, markers, tape, sticky notes

1. Facilitate a group discussion, capturing roles within a pyramidal graphic organizer (with schools at the base as the most important level in the ecosystem):
 - Based on our vision for professional learning at the school level, what must be in place — in terms of culture, leadership, expertise, systems for measurement, time structures, and resources — to effectively implement our definition/vision of professional learning in every school?
 - How can districts establish the necessary conditions to support schools in this work? How can they support increased personalization of professional learning that may be unfeasible in an individual school (e.g. providing content-focused professional learning for subjects with only one teacher in the building)?
 - What is the state’s role in contributing to this system? What are they uniquely suited to do?
2. Consult the handout if helpful to get discussion started. Be sure to cite specific examples that are unique to your context.

**HANDOUT FOR DEFINING HIGH-QUALITY PROFESSIONAL LEARNING
AT THE SCHOOL LEVEL PROTOCOL****KENTUCKY: DEFINITION OF PROFESSIONAL LEARNING**

(704 kAr 3:035. Annual professional development plan)

Section 1. Definitions.

- (1) “Professional development” means professional learning that is an individual and collective responsibility that fosters shared accountability among the entire education workforce for student achievement, and
- (a) aligns with Kentucky’s Core Academic Standards in 704 kAr 3:303, educator effectiveness standards, individual professional growth goals, and school, school district, and state goals for student achievement;
 - (b) focuses on content and pedagogy, as specified in certification requirements, and other related job-specific performance standards and expectations;
 - (c) occurs among educators who share accountability for student growth;
 - (d) is facilitated by school and district leaders, including curriculum specialists, principals, instructional coaches, mentors, teachers or teacher leaders;
 - (e) Focuses on individual improvement, school improvement, and program implementation;
 - (f) occurs several times per week.

“Professional development program” means a sustained and coherent professional learning process that is measurable by indicators and includes professional learning and ongoing support to transfer that learning to practice.

- (2) Professional development shall:
- (a) be related to the teacher’s instructional assignments and the administrator’s professional responsibilities.
 - (b) be aligned with the school or district improvement plan or the individual professional growth plans of teachers;
 - (c) occur within learning communities committed to continuous improvement, collective responsibility, and goal alignment;
 - (d) be facilitated by skillful leaders who develop capacity and [,] advocate and create support systems for professional learning;
 - (e) be prioritized and monitored by the district;
 - (f) Use a variety of sources and types of student, educator, and system data to plan, assess, and evaluate professional learning;
 - (g) Integrate theories, research, and models of human learning to achieve its intended outcomes;
 - (h) Apply current research on systems change and sustain support for implementation of professional learning for long-term instructional improvement as evidenced by student growth;
 - (i) Align its outcomes with educator performance and student curriculum standards; and
 - (j) Focus resources on areas of identified need.

**HANDOUT FOR DEFINING HIGH-QUALITY PROFESSIONAL LEARNING
AT THE SCHOOL LEVEL PROTOCOL****CONNECTICUT: DEFINITION OF PROFESSIONAL LEARNING**

(Professional Development Defined in PA 12-116)

According to Connecticut's Education Reform Act of 2012, the Connecticut State Department of Education (CSDE) must ensure that Local boards of Education provide each certified employee the guidance and resources to participate in a program of professional development which shall:

- "(1) be a comprehensive, sustained and intensive approach to improving teacher and administrator effectiveness in increasing student knowledge achievement;
- (2) Focus on refining and improving various effective teaching methods that are shared between and among educators;
- (3) Foster collective responsibility for improved student performance; and
- (4) Comprise professional learning that
 - (a) aligns with rigorous state student academic achievement standards;
 - (b) is conducted among educators at the school and is facilitated by principals, coaches, mentors, distinguished educators, or other appropriate teachers;
 - (c) occurs frequently on an individual basis or among groups of teachers in a job-embedded process of continuous improvement; and
 - (d) includes a repository of best practices for teaching methods developed by educators within each school that is continuously available to such educators for comment and updating" (PA 12-116, Section 138 (a).

**HANDOUT FOR DEFINING HIGH-QUALITY PROFESSIONAL LEARNING
AT THE SCHOOL LEVEL PROTOCOL****MICHIGAN: DEFINITION OF PROFESSIONAL LEARNING**

Professional learning is a comprehensive, sustained, and intensive approach to improving educators' effectiveness in raising student achievement. Professional learning provides opportunities for professional discourse, analysis, application, and reflection. It is relevant learning that is essential to ongoing improvements in professional practice and job effectiveness.

Systemic design, development, and implementation of effective professional learning must meet the following quality indicators:

- Build upon learning goals and objectives identified and developed throughout the educator's career, beginning in pre-service preparation, and aligned to the educator certification process;
- Align with Michigan's Standards for Professional Learning, rigorous student content standards, and educator performance standards and with local school improvement plans to improve job performance and student growth and proficiency;
- Engage personnel in a process of continuous improvement in which evidence and data are used to assess needs, define learning goals, design learning opportunities, and evaluate the effectiveness of the professional learning on job performance and student growth and proficiency;
- Facilitate sustained, collaborative, job embedded professional learning, including opportunities to participate in communities of practice
- Provide continuous learning to support and sustain the transfer of new knowledge and skills to the work place;
- Provide increased opportunities among stakeholder organizations for collaboration and collective support for the learning of children, youth, and adults; and
- Utilize and leverage the necessary resources for continuous professional learning, ensuring that local, state, and federal funds are aligned and in compliance with professional learning policy.

The State board of Education recommends that each Michigan school and district establish sustained, job embedded, relevant professional learning opportunities that meet the above criteria for all school and district staff based on this Professional Learning Policy. (Michigan's Professional Learning Policy, 2012).

HANDOUT ESSENTIAL ROLES IN OUR PROFESSIONAL LEARNING ECOSYSTEMESSENTIAL ROLES: **STATE**

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ESSENTIAL ROLES: **DISTRICTS**

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ESSENTIAL ROLES: **SCHOOLS**

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TOOL
2

PROGRAM AND POLICY REVIEW



After articulating a vision for professional learning systems and state, district, and school-based roles in implementing these systems, begin to consider how your current policies and investments align with your vision.

The first inventory focuses on existing professional learning programs and how they align to the definition of professional learning. Insert the criteria from your definition into the gray columns. In the rows, list out your state’s various professional learning investments, considering any significant state-wide investments by other organizations (e.g. statewide unions, nonprofits).

The second inventory provides the opportunity to explore the policies that can incent or be barriers to systems of professional learning. List relevant policies, and use the gray columns to identify how these policies establish the conditions needed in a healthy professional learning ecosystem.

After completing the charts, look across the gray columns in each inventory. Are there programs or policies with no discernible impact? Do measures need to be established and data collected, or should the program or policy be strategically abandoned? Are there gaps in the conditions for professional learning systems that must be addressed? Or are there programs that don’t seem to align with the definition of professional learning that has been established? Use the discussion questions at the end of this tool to focus the discussion.

PROFESSIONAL LEARNING PROGRAM INVENTORY									
Program	Sponsor/ Organizer	Implementation Status	Evidence of Impact for Students and Educators	Definition Criteria: Expert Leadership	Definition Criteria: Job- embedded	Definition Criteria:	Definition Criteria:	Maintain, Adjust, or Abandon?	
Example: Early Learning Educator Series	SEA/Head Start	Implemented in 20% of schools; uneven quality	None yet		x				

POLICY INVENTORY (AND ECOSYSTEM ANALYSIS)						
Policy	Implementation Status	Evidence of Impact	Supports Vision	Builds PL Leadership	Measures Impact	Aligns Resources
Example: Adoption of Professional Learning Standards	In statute — no capacity building yet	None yet	x			

DISCUSSION QUESTIONS

1. Looking across the policy inventory, where are there potential **gaps** in the conditions that support professional learning systems? It may be helpful to look across the columns in gray; note if there are any columns that have no supportive policies or programs. These may be opportunities to strengthen the ecosystem that supports professional learning.
2. Looking across the policy inventory, are there any **redundancies** that might be eliminated to free up funds for a more impactful use?
3. Are there any policies which may potentially be a **barrier** to the professional learning systems you envision?
4. How do policies **incentivize** districts to establish professional learning systems in alignment with your vision? How could incentives be strengthened? For example, which state policies and supports help to create a culture of collective responsibility for student learning, and what policies and supports may need to be put in place in our state?



ADDITIONAL TOOLS

To go deeper with this analysis, refer to Learning Forward's [Professional Learning Policy Review](#). For states that are not Learning Forward members, contact Tracy Crow (tracy.crow@learningforward.org) for a copy.

TOOL
3**SAMPLE LOCAL PLAN QUESTION**

In 2017, districts will complete consolidated or title plans to access federal funds. States have an important responsibility to support districts in developing strategic plans for these funds that will have an impact on student learning.

Professional learning is a critical lever to developing the capacity needed to effect change, and this tool is designed to help locals consider how they can best employ their resources to strengthen teaching and leadership in alignment with their big-picture goals for equity and excellence.

Given your vision for professional learning systems and the opportunities and gaps you plan to address through your ESSA plan, adapt the question below and the rubric that follows to meet your needs. This question assumes that LEAs will describe their goals and vision for student learning elsewhere in their plan.

Describe your system of professional growth and improvement at the school level and your district’s strategies to support professional growth and improvement. In your description, please address:

- How your system uses **data and other evidence** to identify teacher and student needs and inform your professional development strategy; also, describe how **stakeholder feedback** was incorporated into your plan;
- How district policies provide sufficient time and **resources** to ensure professional development is sustained, ongoing, and job-embedded
- How the system builds the requisite **leadership capacity** for those who facilitate professional development (and sustains support for them over time);
- How the district is moving toward **evidence-based** professional development that aligns with the new definition of professional development; and
- What measures will be used to determine whether district and school efforts are resulting in improvements in teaching and student outcomes, and your plan for how you will **continuously improve** implementation.

ESSA establishes a new definition of professional development and new evidence requirements. This question asks districts to consider how their investments align with these new requirements, and prompts them to consider how existing investments may need to change or be abandoned.

ITEMIZE YOUR PROFESSIONAL DEVELOPMENT INVESTMENTS AND DESCRIBE HOW EACH IS ALIGNED TO THE REVISED FEDERAL DEFINITION OF PROFESSIONAL DEVELOPMENT					
Program/Investment	Sustained and Intensive	Classroom-Focused	Job-Embedded	Data-Driven	Collaborative

This chart allows districts to conduct their own analysis, and consider the ways their programs might be strengthened to better meet student and teacher needs. We recommend states define these terms — see our examples on p. 56 as a starting point.

FOR ANYTHING THAT IS NOT FULLY ALIGNED TO THE DEFINITION, PLEASE PROVIDE A RATIONALE BELOW.

If this rationale section is blank, consider contacting the district for more information.

QUESTION RESPONSE RUBRIC PART 1			
States may use and adapt this rubric for the sample local plan question to inform districts of expectations, review submitted plans and monitor ongoing results. This rubric may represent more criteria than the state will use in its local plan template, but the tool is designed to show a range of criteria states might select for their process.			
CRITERIA	DOES NOT MEET EXPECTATIONS	MEETS EXPECTATIONS	EXEMPLARY
System Alignment	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> The professional growth and improvement system described does not clearly align with broader goals for achieving equity and excellence The system does not represent a coherent and coordinated approach to achieving the district's goals around equity and excellence The district's plan for its professional learning and investment doesn't reflect meaningful consultation with a variety of stakeholders and doesn't include a plan for ongoing engagement 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> The professional growth and improvement system described clearly aligns with broader goals for achieving equity and excellence The system represents a coherent and coordinated approach to achieving the district's goals around equity and excellence The district's plan for its professional learning and investment reflects meaningful consultation with a variety of stakeholders and includes a plan for ongoing engagement 	<p>In addition to Meets Expectations:</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> The LEA's plan is informed by significant reflection about what has and hasn't worked in the past All federal, state, and local funding sources are aligned to achieve the district's goals; no status-quo spending that is no longer aligned
Use of Data to Improve	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> The system described in the plan isn't informed by the district's data and other evidence The plan doesn't describe the LEA's strategies to identify individual teacher needs 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> The system described in the plan is informed by the district's data and other evidence The plan describes the LEA's strategies to identify individual teacher needs 	<p>In addition to Meets Expectations:</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> The plan describes how the district is using data about student needs to determine teacher learning needs
Capacity: Leadership Expertise, Resources, and Time	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> The plan doesn't demonstrate the district has sufficient expertise and leadership to successfully implement the plan, or there is an incomplete plan to build the requisite expertise and leadership The plan doesn't allocate sufficient resources to successfully implement at the LEA and/or school levels The plan doesn't provide sufficient time for educators' learning, in alignment with the revised definition of professional development 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> The plan demonstrates the district has developed sufficient expertise and leadership to successfully implement the plan, or the plan details strategies to build the requisite expertise and leadership The plan allocates sufficient resources to successfully implement the plan at both the LEA and school levels The plan provides sufficient time for educators' learning, in alignment with the revised definition of professional development (particularly "job-embedded," "sustained" and "ongoing") 	<p>In addition to Meets Expectations:</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> The plan contains ample evidence to demonstrate that the LEA has sufficient expertise, leadership, resources, and time to successfully implement its plan The plan contains measures/metrics to assess whether leadership, expertise, resources, and time are sufficient and leading to positive results

QUESTION RESPONSE RUBRIC PART 2			
States may use and adapt this rubric for the sample local plan question to inform districts of expectations, review submitted plans and monitor ongoing results. This rubric may represent more criteria than the state will use in its local plan template, but the tool is designed to show a range of criteria states might select for their process.			
CRITERIA	DOES NOT MEET EXPECTATIONS	MEETS EXPECTATIONS	EXEMPLARY
Use of Evidence	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> PD investments do not align with the four tiers of evidence as defined by ESSA Strategies aligned to the fourth tier of evidence (as defined by ESSA) do not include a strong rationale and/or a plan for ongoing monitoring 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> Professional development investments align with one of the four tiers of evidence as defined by ESSA Strategies aligned to the fourth tier of evidence (as defined by ESSA) include a strong rationale and a plan for ongoing monitoring 	<p>In addition to Meets Expectations:</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> The plan also contains a strategy for ongoing monitoring of new research in the top three tiers of evidence
Continuous Improvement	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> The plan includes insufficient measures to allow the LEA to determine whether Title II investments are leading to increased educator effectiveness The plan insufficiently describes how the LEA will monitor and continuously improve implementation 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> The plan includes measures that will allow the LEA to determine – as required in ESSA – whether Title II investments are leading to improvements in educator effectiveness The plan describes how the LEA will monitor and continuously improve implementation 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> The plan addresses how the district will act and adjust based on new data The plan describes the process the district will regularly use to review data across teams to scale what's working and address unsuccessful initiatives
Alignment to PD Definition	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> The description doesn't align with ESSA's definition of PD, and/or any exceptions do not align with the state's business rules for exceptions 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> The description aligns with ESSA's definition of PD (such as "sustained," "classroom-focused," "job-embedded," "data-driven," and "collaborative" and any exceptions align with the state's business rules for exceptions 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> All strategies described in the plan are aligned with ESSA's definition of PD

POTENTIAL DEFINITIONS OF KEY TERMS IN ESSA'S DEFINITION OF PROFESSIONAL DEVELOPMENT

To ensure districts fully understand each of the terms used in the definition of professional development, states should develop and disseminate their own definitions. A few examples, based on Learning Forward's standards and publications, are included below to jump start states' thinking:

Sustained professional development involves intentional and focused learning for the period of time required for successful implementation. Learning Forward clarifies that professional development that is sustained lasts more than the term of one day or a short, self-contained workshop.¹

Collaborative involves teams of educators who share a common goal or problem and commitment to learn, work, and problem solve together. Most effective when it leads to shared responsibility for the success of the members as well as the students represented by the group.

Job-embedded professional development (JEPD) refers to teacher learning that is grounded in day-to-day teaching practice and is designed to enhance teachers' content-specific instructional practices with the intent of improving student learning (Darling-Hammond & McLaughlin, 1995; Hirsh, 2009). It can be referred to as "just-in-time" or "real-time" learning because the support occurs during the actual teaching process.

Data-driven includes using a variety of sources and types of student, educator, and system data to identify learning needs, set goals, plan, assess, and evaluate professional learning, preferably in a cycle of ongoing learning and improvement.

Classroom-focused professional development is specifically focused on the curriculum, instructional practices, and assessments that teachers are learning to implement during instruction and the outcomes that students are expected to master.

¹ Ensure Great Teaching for Every Child. (Apr. 2009). Learning Forward, NSDC Policy Points, 1(2). Retrieved from <https://learningforward.org/docs/pdf/policypoints4-09.pdf?sfvrsn=0>