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12234

OFFICE OF SCHOOL INNOVATION

Site-Visit Protocol For Persistently Lowest Achieving (PLA) Schools

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Table of Contents

Overview and Purpose of the Site-Visit - Page 2

Conducting the Site-Visit – Pages 3-4

Required Documentation – Pages 4-5

Focus Questions – Pages 5-7

Example of Site-Visit Schedule – Page 8

Responsibilities of the School Leader – Pages 8-9

Work Flow and Timelines – Pages 9-10

Site-Visit Code of Conduct – Page 10

Reporting – Page 11

Overview and Purpose of the Site-Visit

The primary purpose for the site-visit is to collect information regarding the progress the district/school is making based on their school improvement grant (SIG) plan. The New York State Education Department (NYSED) will review the implementation plan related to the school's operations, in areas such as

- curriculum planning,
- assessment, data
- staff development, district support and
- performance evaluation.

The site-visits and subsequent reports are intended to provide the district/school with feedback to assist schools in making decisions about how to improve academic programs or operations. To this end, NYSED gathers information and documents evidence about the school's performance based on actions completed as outlined in the implementation plan.

Visits usually begin with a series of telephone calls and culminate with a full-day or half-day visit to the school. They are one of the means by which NYSED documents performance and progress over time. Teams vary in size, usually one to four persons. Team members will conduct teleconferences or face-to-face interviews with administrators, teachers, external partners, students and parents. They will visit classrooms to observe instruction and review documents and materials, which NYSED will request be sent electronically to the Persistently Low Achieving Schools (PLA) office prior to the visit. Schools with serious challenges may receive either several announced and/or unannounced visits.

NYSED assumes that the school leader will act as the coordinator and liaison for site-visits. However, the school has the option of designating another person to assume this role. The following represents a general overview of the site-visit, as well as some of the required documents to be made available before and during the visit.

Conducting the Site-Visit

On-site school visits and the resulting report are guided by the following structure:

A. Introduction and morning orientation	
<ul style="list-style-type: none">• NYSED team introduces itself to school leadership team.• Team establishes the context for the visit and orients team members to the purpose and goals.• The schedule for the day is reviewed and focus group assignments are finalized.• School leadership briefly orients the team to the building and establishes context for classroom visits.	
B. Site visit team conducts classroom visits, document review, focus group interviews and additional information gathering	
<ul style="list-style-type: none">• Site-visit team members may participate in a combination of classroom visits, document review, optional follow-up focus group interviews and additional information gathering depending on specifics of the school visit.• Conversations and observations will be guided by the site-visit protocol and guiding questions.• Classroom observations will be guided by the Joint Intervention Team (JIT) report, school improvement plans and/or the School Improvement Grant (SIG) application, as applicable.	
C. Focus group interviews	
<ul style="list-style-type: none">• All focus group interviews are facilitated by a member of the site-visit team.• Focus groups should be no larger than eight persons.• The team member introduces him/herself, and establishes the context for the visit.• He/She sets the norms for the conversation, establishes the time frame, and lets the group know that questions asked are drawn from a set pool of focus group questions.• Introductions among team and focus group members gathered.• The team member facilitates the conversation, opening with common questions asked of all groups at all schools. Questioning may then become more specific and tailored to the specific school context. Whenever possible the team member will guide the focus group members to ground their answers with specific evidence and data.• The team member takes notes and asks follow-up questions, as appropriate.• The team member thanks the focus group for their participation and ends the focus group on time.	
D. Classroom observations	
<ul style="list-style-type: none">• School leadership informs school staff in advance that the site-visit team will be in classrooms during the day of the visit.• Collectively, the team visits as many classrooms as possible during the day of the visit.• Team members should see at least one opening of a lesson, one closing of a lesson, and a few transitions between lessons.• It is best if only one visitor at a time observes a classroom.• Classroom visitors will not be disruptive to classroom activities. Visitors will not interrupt the lesson, and will take cues from the teachers and students as to where to sit and, if appropriate, to talk with students.	
A Framework for Teaching: Components of Professional Practice	
<u>Planning and Preparation</u> <ul style="list-style-type: none"><input type="checkbox"/> Demonstrating Knowledge of Content and Pedagogy<input type="checkbox"/> Demonstrating Knowledge of Students<input type="checkbox"/> Setting Instructional Outcomes<input type="checkbox"/> Demonstrating Knowledge of Resources<input type="checkbox"/> Designing Coherent Instruction<input type="checkbox"/> Designing Student Assessments	<u>The Classroom Environment</u> <ul style="list-style-type: none"><input type="checkbox"/> Creating an Environment of Respect and Rapport<input type="checkbox"/> Establishing a Culture for Learning<input type="checkbox"/> Managing Classroom Procedures<input type="checkbox"/> Managing Student Behavior<input type="checkbox"/> Organizing Physical Space
<u>Instruction</u> <ul style="list-style-type: none"><input type="checkbox"/> Communicating with Students<input type="checkbox"/> Using Questioning and Discussion Techniques<input type="checkbox"/> Engaging Students in Learning<input type="checkbox"/> Using Assessment in Instruction<input type="checkbox"/> Demonstrating Flexibility and Responsiveness	<u>Professional Responsibilities</u> <ul style="list-style-type: none"><input type="checkbox"/> Reflecting on Teaching<input type="checkbox"/> Maintaining Accurate Records<input type="checkbox"/> Communicating with Families<input type="checkbox"/> Participating in a Professional Community<input type="checkbox"/> Growing and Developing Professionally<input type="checkbox"/> Showing Professionalism

E. Team organization and debrief preparation
<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Team members are reminded to refrain from judgment and ground comments in evidence, observations and data. • The team conducts a debriefing of the day, structured by the approved School Improvement Grant application, classroom observations, focus group responses and/or document review, as applicable. • Site-visit team members gather additional evidence and data to fill in gaps through follow-up conversations with key school staff. • The team creates initial preliminary findings and outlines the next steps of reviewing the resulting site-visit report.
F. School community report out/debrief
<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • The team thanks school and district leadership for hosting the site-visit team and outlines the timeline for preparing and issuing the resulting site-visit report. • The team leader shares the team’s initial findings, structured by classroom observations, focus group responses and document review.
G. Site-visit report
<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • The team drafts the site-visit report for internal NYSED review within one week after the visit. • Members review the report to ensure that it is factually accurate and reflects the collective findings of the team on the day of the visit. Corrections and suggestions for improvement are incorporated according to consensus approximately two to four weeks after the visit. • The team reviews and issues the final report to the school and district leadership. The report is sent to the school via e-mail approximately four to six weeks after the visit. • School leadership may prepare a response to the site-visit report that is submitted in writing to NYSED within 10 days; any response also becomes a permanent part of the school’s record.

Required Documentation
On-site School Visits

Due to the time constraints of a one-day or shorter site visit, it is impossible to review thoroughly large quantities of data and evidence. This being said, if there are items not on the lists below that you would like to make available to the site-visit team, feel free to do so. There is no need to run more than one copy of any documentation other than the school map. While on site, a member of NYSED may ask to borrow copies of documents to be used in writing the site-visit report.

Checklist – <i>pre-visit</i> documentation – due to NYSED electronically <u>two weeks</u> prior to visit	Document Submitted
1. Directions and map to the school, including telephone number and any necessary parking instructions ; also, indicate if public transportation is available and relay relevant directions	
2. A bell schedule and master class schedule for the day of the visit that clearly indicates the subjects taught and times), teachers and facilities map to show room assignments for all math, ELA, AIS/RTI, ELL and SWD resource classrooms	
3. Summaries and analyses (short narratives, charts, graphs, etc.) of interim assessments results —Please provide any additional data or other documentation that the school has aggregated which gives a current picture of student achievement.	
4. A staff roster that includes administrator and teacher names, and administrative role or subject and/or grade taught, and if the teacher is employed in his/her area of certification	
5. The school’s administrative organizational chart with titles and names that show reporting structures	
6. Prepare a short description of current instructional practices (1-3 paragraphs, no more than one page). This document should answer the question, “ <i>What should school visitors expect to see during classroom observations?</i> ”	

7. Professional development calendars, agendas and staff attendance documentation	
8. Lists of staff, parents and students for telephone focus groups, with a brief explanation of how they were recruited (<i>e.g.</i> , where and when it was publicized, how many volunteered, and how were the final participants chosen?)	
9. Any other documentation that helps to tell the story of your school to an external team of visitors; Curricular documents and/or explanation of academic program, lesson plan formats, pacing guides, etc.; Existing documents, including the JIT report, comprehensive educational plans (CEP), curriculum audits or other strategic and school improvement plans, are examples of documentation that should be provided	

Checklists of on-site documentation – make these items available in the site visit team’s meeting space or have them readily accessible.	Document Available
1. Copies of facilities map, staff roster, student handbook, monthly school attendance analysis, monthly school discipline data and trends (<i>e.g.</i> , PBIS referrals; in-school suspensions; out of school suspensions; police arrests, etc) and lists of staff, students and parents available for follow-up focus groups, as necessary	
2. Copies of the school improvement plans and the SIG application	
3. Summaries of family, teacher and student school climate survey results for past two years	
4. Samples of teacher and administrator evaluation tools	
5. Explanation of interim assessment program and any relevant samples	
6. Teachers should have copies of lesson plans and class handouts available to distribute to site visitors who observe their classroom.	
7. Anything from the pre-visit checklist that was not already provided	

Focus Group Questions

On-site School Visits

The following are examples of questions that may be asked of particular focus groups. The team might also have specific questions based upon the review of documents before the visit and on evidence gathered during the day.

A. School Leadership
<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Describe the roles of each member of the administrative team. • Describe your relationship with district leadership. • What is the school’s mission? How is it articulated? To whom is it articulated and how often? • What are the school’s greatest strengths? What is working well in the school? • Why do you think previous school improvement efforts have failed? • What are the school’s academic priorities? • Describe the school’s academic program in terms of curriculum, instruction and assessment. • How is the curriculum developed, how is its effectiveness evaluated, and how is it revised? • How often will classrooms be visited this year? What is your focus when you visit classrooms? • How are the needs of teachers, students and parents assessed? • Describe the process for supervision and evaluation of teachers. What are your expectations for what constitutes excellent instruction? • What is the school’s strategy for improvement in these areas, and how does the school support teachers in their implementation of these strategies?

- How does the school review your performance? How often does this occur?
- What professional development and other forms of support regarding effective leadership are made available to you or will be provided during the school year?
- How often do district administrators visit this school? What is the purpose of the visits?
- What programs and actions plans, outlined in the SIG, are fully implemented or currently running? What is the progress of each to date?
- What programs and action plans are in the planning stages? Which ones are not yet operational?
- What challenges have you encountered to this point, and what steps have you taken to overcome them?

B. Teachers

- What kind of teacher is best suited to teach at this school?
- Who is (are) the instructional leader(s) at this school?
- Describe the working relationships (collaborations) between teachers.
- What are the school's academic priorities? How were these priorities determined?
- Why do you think previous school improvement efforts have failed?
- What are the expectations for what constitutes excellent instruction at this school?
- Describe the school's curriculum. How was it developed? How is its effectiveness evaluated, and how is it revised?
- Are you required to follow any specific formats or procedures in your teaching and lesson planning?
- Do you submit lesson plans for review? If so, do you receive feedback on them?
- How is it ensured that teachers stay on track regarding curriculum pacing?
- What assessments do you use to track student learning?
- Describe the review process of student performance. How do you receive student performance data and how do you review it? How often does this process occur? What happens after the performance review?
- What are the school's strategies for improvement in these areas, and what support do you receive in implementing these strategies?
- How does the school review your performance? How often does this occur?
- What professional development and other forms of support are made available to you?
- What, if anything, is your role in the school beyond classroom instruction?
- What information do you provide to parents?
- What challenges have you encountered to this point, and what steps have you and/or the school leadership taken to overcome them?

Special Education Coordinator/Teacher

- What kinds of instructional supports and services are made available to special education students at this school?
- What types of accommodations and modifications are being made in the regular education classroom for students with diverse learning needs?
- What ancillary academic supports and services are available to all students?
- What have been the outcomes for students with disabilities in terms of promotion, graduation, and NYS assessment program passing rates? What is their progress on internal assessments?
- What challenges have you encountered to this point, and what steps have you and/or the school leadership taken to overcome them?

English Language Learners Coordinator/Teacher

- What English language support services do ELL students receive and how are those services delivered?
- How does your school implement structured English immersion in the regular education classrooms?
- What have been the outcomes for ELL students in terms of promotion, graduation, and NYS assessment program passing rates? What is their progress on internal assessments?
- What challenges have you encountered to this point, and what steps have you and/or the school leadership taken to overcome them?

C. Students

- What is the mission of the school?
- What is working well in the school?
- How long have you attended school here?
- Tell us what it's like to be a student here.
- How does this school compare with others you've attended?

- Describe your teachers.
- Tell us about a recent assignment or the one you brought with you today. What did you learn by doing this assignment? Was it challenging? Explain. Did a teacher assess or grade this piece of work? How?
- Do you find the work challenging?
- How do you get help if you need it?
- How safe is your school?
- What happens if someone misbehaves?
- What would you like to change about this school?
- What is on your “wish list” for the school?

D. Families

- Did you choose to send your child(ren) to this school?
- What is your role/involvement in the school?
- What is the school’s mission?
- What is working well in the school?
- Is the school a safe place?
- What does the school expect of your children academically?
- What does the school do to support your child(ren)?
- What information does the school provide to you about your child’s learning?
- Why do you think previous school improvement efforts have failed?
- What are the school’s biggest challenges?
- What is on your “wish list” for the school?

Sample On-site Visit Schedule

Time	Team Member A	Team Member B	Team Member C
7:30 – 8:	Team Meeting		
8:00 – 8:30	Focus Group – School Leaders Orientation to the process		
8:30 to 9:00	Class Visits	Class Visits	Class Visits
9:00 to 9:30	<i>Optional</i> Focus Group follow-up with Parents	Class Visits	Class Visits
9:30 to 10:00	Class Visits	<i>Optional</i> Focus Group follow-up with Students	Class Visits
10:00 to 10:30	Class Visits	Class Visits	<i>Optional</i> Focus Group follow-up with Teachers
10:30 to 11:00	Class Visits	Class Visits	Class Visits
11:00 to 12:00	Document Review		
12:00 to 1:00	Initial Team Discussion/Team lunch (The school should provide lunch)		
1:00 to 2:30	Additional Fact Finding, Document Review, Class Visits, Focus Groups and Team Work Time		
2:30 to 3:15	Team Discussion		
3:15 to 3:30	Presentation of general observations and preliminary findings to school leaders		

Responsibilities of the Principal

On-site School Visits

Pre-visit
<p>A. Review the <i>Site Visit Protocol</i> and speak with school and district leadership to orient them to the purpose of the site visit, what their respective roles will be during the day and what to expect when the team is visiting the school. <i>It is the expectation of the team that all classrooms in the school will be available for observation.</i></p> <p>B. The bulk of the monitoring protocol plans for telephone conference calls to be conducted to gather information about the school’s progress in implementing the SIG plan in advance of the site visit. The site visit itself is mainly for the observation of the classroom interactions and the general climate of the school.</p> <p>C. After the scheduling e-mail communication from NYSED arrives, notify staff of the date of the site-visit and prepare for at least four (4) telephone conference calls between NYSED and each focus group (principal/leadership team, teachers, students and parents). It is possible that as many as three (3), or more, additional telephone conference calls may be necessary. The NYSED team leader needs to speak specifically to the special education coordinator, the ELL coordinator and possibly the school leadership team.</p> <p>D. Inform parent community and students of the opportunity to participate in an on-site focus group telephone conference call with the NYSED team at a mutually convenient time, to be conducted at a mutually agreeable time.</p> <p>E. Solicit and organize constituent focus groups and arrange an appropriate school site for the telephone conference calls. Prepare a list of the names for each focus group and a brief explanation of how the members of each were chosen (1-3 sentences for each group).</p>

<p>F. Review this documents’ pre-visit documentation list and gather the information the site-visit team needs before the visit and those documents requested be available while on site (see p. 5 of this document).</p> <p>G. Discuss any questions with your assigned NYSED team leader who will contact you after the letter is sent. Arrange the conference call with NYSED team leader; include school leadership team as appropriate.</p> <p>H. Finalize focus group telephone conference calls schedule with NYSED team leaders for each constituent group.</p> <p>I. Identify a secure place that can serve as a meeting room for the team throughout the day.</p> <p>J. Two weeks before the visit, send pre-visit documents from the checklist to NYSED in electronic format (PDF or MS Word). These documents will be used to build the preparation binders for the site-visit team members and to help organize the visit.</p> <p>K. Assemble and organize on-site documentation as listed in “Required Documentation.”</p> <p>L. The day will generally follow the schedule, or can be modified to meet the particular needs of a school. The schedule needs to be finalized with NYSED at least one week prior to the visit.</p>
During the On-site Visit
<p>A. Meet with NYSED site-visit team for orientation (described on p. 3).</p> <p>B. Ensure coordination of focus group interview sessions.</p> <p>C. Meet with NYSED site-visit team for debriefing session to go over initial findings. Ensure that appropriate school/staff personnel are available for this meeting.</p>
After the Visit
<p>A. Review site-visit report. Forward any factual corrections to NYSED team leader within one week of receiving report. Disseminate and discuss findings with constituent groups.</p> <p>B. The School Leader may prepare a written response to be sent to NYSED, also within 10 days of receiving the report.</p> <p>C. The School should continue to implement components of school improvement plans, as well as address issues or concerns from the site-visit report.</p>

NYS Education Department (SED) & School Work Flow and Timelines

On-Site School Visits

Pre-Visit	Timeline
SED: Send out scheduling letter to schools via e-mail. Pre-visit document request is attached and NYSED team lead contact information is provided.	One month prior to visit
SCHOOL: Confirm proposed date for site-visit.	As soon as possible upon receipt
SCHOOL: Prepare pre-visit documents and sends electronically to NYSED (PDF, RTF or MS Word).	Two weeks prior to the visit
SED: Prepares the prep binders for the site-visit team.	One week prior to the visit
SCHOOL: Arrange for parents, teachers and students to participate in focus group interviews via school site-based telephone conference call with NYSED team. Arrange for a secure space for the site-visit team to meet.	Ongoing during the month before the visit
SCHOOL: Finalize, with NYSED, the schedules for the telephone conference focus group interview and plans for the day of the site visit.	Two weeks prior to visit
SCHOOL: Gather and organize on-site documents for the site-visit team.	Ongoing
Day of the Visit	Timeline
SED site-visit team will conduct mainly classroom observations and document review. Work time for the team and focus group follow-up interviews will occur as necessary.	0.5 to 1.0 day, as determined by NYSED
SED site-visit team will briefly present the initial findings of the site visit. This meeting is open to school and/or district leadership. It is not intended to be further discussion, but will provide an opportunity for the school to correct any factual errors in the information NYSED reports.	No more than 30 minutes, at the end of the visit

After the Visit	Timeline
SED site-visit team will create a draft of the site-visit report for internal review, with evidence-based findings.	One week after the visit
SED site-visit team will review the report to ensure that it is factually accurate and reflects the collective findings of the team on the day of the visit and integrates results of all or the focus group telephone conference interviews. The team will incorporate corrections and suggestions for improvement based on internal review. The NYSED lead may contact the principal for further information or clarification.	Two weeks after the visit
SED will issue the final site-visit report for the school by sending electronic and hard copies to the school and district leadership.	Four to six weeks after the visit
School leadership may choose to prepare a written response to the site-visit report that becomes a part of the school's record. The report and any response from the school will be posted to the NYSED website for public viewing.	Within 10 days after the final report is issued

Site Visit Code of Conduct for NYSED Site-Visit Team Members

On-site School Visits

A. Carry out work with integrity.
<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Treat all those you meet with courtesy and sensitivity. • Show respect, value opinions, and convey interest in what every individual says. • Focus your attention and questions on topics that will reveal how well students are learning. • Assure confidentiality. • Approach the review of a school with a clear understanding of that school's particular mission, educational philosophy and goals.
B. Act with the best interests of students and staff in mind.
<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Do not put students or staff in a position where they may have conflicting loyalties. • Emphasize that students come first and are at the center of the review. • Wherever possible, work to others' convenience. • Be supportive and enabling. Evidence given under undue stress is unreliable. • Under no circumstances criticize the work of a teacher, or anyone else involved with the school during the course of an observation period or focus group. • Observations are confidential to the teacher and team. • Try to understand what teachers are doing and why.
C. Be objective, base judgments on evidence not opinion.
<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Judgments must be fully supported by evidence and logically defensible with data. • Judgments must be reliable in that others would make the same judgment from the same evidence. • Judgments must be based on evidence gathered in the context of the school, not in comparison to personal preference or opinion. • An individual's perception can be evidence, especially if supported by others' observations. • Be prepared to ask questions to establish whether a view is based on opinion or evidence. This applies to team members' judgments as well. • Discussion with staff and team members is part of the process to create a fair and secure evidence base from which judgments are made. Opinions may help inform discussion but are not part of the evidence. • The bottom line is whether the evidence is affecting students' learning. If there is no evidence to show that it is, then it isn't an issue.

Reporting

At the end of the on-site visit, the team leader shares the team's initial findings with the school in a brief report-out. The team leader's statements do not make suggestions for improvement or direct the school to change operations or programs. Rather, the findings are statements of fact, grounded in evidence and data collected throughout the day.

After the visit, NYSED prepares a written report that includes the team's findings and the evidence to support those findings. If the school chooses, a response to the site-visit report may be submitted in writing to NYSED. This response and the site-visit report become a part of the school's permanent record, and become a part of the pool of evidence used to determine a school's performance.

Final Written Report

School will receive a written report on the findings within four to six weeks after the site visit. The School will have 10 days to provide evidence of any factual errors in the report. It is not an opportunity for the School to debate the interpretations made by the team. The report will only be changed to correct factual errors and any interpretations made based upon faulty data, which the school may refute with persuasive evidence. School responses will be appended to the report as part of the record of the site visit. All reports and responses will be posted to the NYSED website for public viewing.