The Pennsylvania Department of Education's (PDE) mission is to lead and serve the educational community to enable each individual to grow into an inspired, productive, fulfilled, lifelong learner. In order to achieve this mission, all PDE initiatives, supports, professional development activities, plans and management decisions since 2002 have been developed and implemented with this goal as the focal point. While NCLB requires each state educational agency to establish a statewide system of support, it has always been the belief of PDE, as evidenced in its mission statement, that in order for students to achieve, the appropriate supports and services must be made available to everyone tasked with the responsibility of getting those students to proficiency and beyond.

Since the inception of NCLB, PDE, with the assistance of outside entities, has been working and continues to work to build, establish and implement a comprehensive statewide system of school support that addresses the needs of all K-12 schools and students regardless of their needs and regardless of their AYP status. Certainly, schools and districts struggling with achievement issues and falling short of state AYP targets need and receive more intensive, differentiated supports, but in order to ensure that ALL students are challenged and inspired, Pennsylvania’s Statewide System of School Support provides assistance for ALL, wherever they find themselves right now in their goal of having all children proficient by 2014.

Pennsylvania’s research-proven model is based on three tiers: Foundation Assistance, Field-Based Assistance and Targeted Assistance. A series of tools, resources, supports and programs have been developed by PDE and its partners to assist schools and districts in making decisions and research-proven changes in the educational environment to positively impact student achievement. The supports provided at the “Foundation” level are for everyone. The programs and resources available under the Field-Based and Targeted Assistance levels are designed specifically for the schools in School Improvement and LEAs in District Improvement, or with schools in School Improvement. The intensity of the supports increase as the level of School Improvement/Corrective Action increases and schools move through the second tier and enter into the third tier of the model.
Because the capacity needed to provide support to 501 school districts and over 100 charter schools is beyond what the PDE alone can provide, many partners have worked closely with the PDE in the development of the research-proven tools and resources, as well as in delivering the training and content to the LEAs and schools. These partners include 29 Intermediate Units, 3 regionally-based Pennsylvania Training and Technical Assistance Networks (PaTTAN), the Center for Data Driven Reform in Education, the Center for Schools and Communities, the Title I State Parent Advisory Committee, the Parent Information Resource Center and the Mid-Atlantic Comprehensive Center.

Several additional leadership groups also function within PA to effectively manage the Statewide System of School Support (SSOSS), include partners in decision making and ensure that the necessary services and supports are provided.

As demonstrated in the graphic above, the Bureau of Teaching & Learning Support is the PDE office responsible for the development and implementation of the SSOS. This bureau takes the lead on managing the SSOS, maintaining the partnerships necessary to support the SSOS, garnering new partners as needed and making policy-level decisions around the work of the SSOS. To assist in this role, the bureau has contracted with Delaware County IU 25 to serve as the lead in coordinating services offered by all partners, school improvement planning statewide and development and delivery of training statewide.

The School Improvement Leadership Team serves to inform the policy makers in the PDE and Bureau of Teaching and Learning Support and to provide a comprehensive leadership approach to school improvement planning and implementation. The members of the team include representatives from many different educational arenas including, but not limited to, IU Executive Directors, Superintendents, PaTTAN, professional associations, special education representatives, Delaware County IU 25 and PDE representatives. The leadership team meets regularly to discuss important school improvement issues, timelines, research-proven approaches, current issues in education and NCLB. All issues brought up during leadership meetings and recommendations made by members are reviewed by a core group of people in order that they may be addressed and/or carried out appropriately statewide. This core group is the third and final leadership body involved in the SSOS, the School Improvement Core Team.

The School Improvement Core Team is a small group of PDE staff and Delaware County IU 25 staff who review issues brought up by the SI Leadership Team, determine if changes need to be made to policies and procedures, implement recommendations made and provide overall management of the SSOS. While it is the SI Leadership Team’s task to bring out issues, initiate conversations and come up with solutions, it is the SI Core Team’s responsibility to make everything happen in a manageable, coordinated, organized, effective manner. The SI Core Team meets once every two weeks to ensure that all timelines are met, necessary decisions are made and that activities take place as planned.

Among all three of these leadership groups, there are separate and distinct roles, but each must work together cooperatively and consistently. Members of each group cross over into the others so that the same messages are carried from one to the other and all have opportunities to provide feedback.
It is at this level of support where schools and districts can receive support and assistance for educational issues that are newly identified or even forecast so they can be addressed early, before negatively impacting student achievement. For example, schools identified as Making AYP may have a small subgroup of students facing an issue that could cause the school to not make AYP in several years as targets increase. They can access these foundational supports and services to correct the situation now with programs and practices that are proven to work.

Pennsylvania System of School Assessment (PSSA) data from schools in School Improvement I & II indicates that when effective support is provided while a school is in these levels of improvement, nearly three-quarters are able to exit school improvement before moving into corrective action. Based on this data and the others, PDE believes that Foundation Assistance must be focused on as much as the other two tiers in the system so that no school finds itself faced with monumental achievement problems that will take years to address effectively. Likewise, PDE must help schools and districts begin to think of “school improvement” as a continual process, not just a process that is activated when a school is identified for improvement. Through familiarization and integration of these Foundation Assistance programs and supports, PDE believes this will be achieved.

The Foundation Assistance available to all school districts and charter schools is best categorized into three areas: 1) Intermediate Unit Capacity Building; 2) Programs, Initiatives and Tools; 3) Professional Development Opportunities.

**Intermediate Unit Capacity Building**

Pennsylvania provides public education to its students through 501 public school districts and over 100 charter schools. These public schools are spread out over more than 46,000 square miles and provide services to over 1.8 million students in a state that is largely rural. In order to more effectively provide services to these students (as well as nonpublic school students), the Pennsylvania School Code was amended in 1970 to create 29 regional Intermediate Units (IUs) that would provide services such as curriculum development, instructional improvement services, educational planning services, pupil personnel services, state and federal liaison services and more to the schools located within its geographical area. Since their inception, the IUs have built strong relationships within their regions and across the state and are consistently looked to for educational supports and assistance from schools, parents, community members and the PDE.

Because such an imbedded and useful regional support system already exists in PA, the most effective and efficient manner in which to offer increased supports to schools is to utilize this structure and to build and enhance its capacity to provide school support services that are research-proven to be effective.

The PDE has worked in partnership with all 29 IUs in PA to create and implement the IU Capacity Building Program with the intention of providing financial and technical support to IU staff in order that they will provide assistance to schools regarding: data and root cause analysis, school improvement planning, student assessment, effective teaching strategies, interventions and special education, and quality implementation of the plan.

The IU Capacity Building Program provides supports across all three tiers of the SSOS (Level I, II, III), but at the Foundation Assistance tier Level I support is available. Each IU is provided state funding at Level I that is based on the total number of schools within the districts located within its geographical region. (i.e. the more
districts/schools in the IU, the greater level of funding) These funds are used by each IU to support the services provided to schools needing support in any of the areas. Schools may or may not be in any level of improvement, but can access staff from their own IU or any other IU in the state that may have expertise in a specific area. Staff within each IU are highly trained in the area of school improvement and are available for assistance whenever needed. They provide both on-site and off-site supports.

Programs, Initiatives and Tools

PDE and its many partners have worked together to develop many programs, initiatives and tools for use by schools and districts statewide for various purposes. One purpose for developing these programs, initiatives and tools is to provide IUs with standardized materials for use with schools. By providing standardized tools and materials, PDE can ensure the same message is carried out to all schools and that the message(s) is standards-driven and effective. Another purpose for developing these items is to ensure that while demanding high levels of accountability from schools, proper supports are available, if requested, that will allow schools and students to achieve.

All Foundation Assistance programs, initiatives and tools are available to all schools, but for schools in school improvement and corrective action, the supports provided to utilize and implement these resources become more intensive and directed.

Below is a summary of the various programs, initiatives and tools provided through PDE or one of its SSOS partners and available at the Foundation Assistance level to ALL schools and/or districts:

- **Getting Results! Framework for School Improvement Planning**: Getting Results! is a framework or template used by schools to develop school improvement plans. The tool currently takes schools through a three-step process in which school-based teams: collect data, analyze data and determine root cause and develop an action plan to implement for improvement. By using this framework schools are required to ask hard questions about their educational practices, their organization, their teaching staff, their instructional materials and more. The framework has been designed to ensure that Title I School Improvement and SWP requirements are all addressed, so a school can develop one, comprehensive plan.

- **School Improvement Plan Review and Continuous Improvement**: Schools in school improvement are required to develop and submit a school improvement plan that meets all state-level requirements as well as NCLB requirements. These plans are two year plans and must be implemented the year following identification for improvement. Schools receive support and assistance through the IUs and PDE staff during the development of the plans and begin implementation in the fall of each school year. In the spring, implementation of the plans is reviewed and if adjustments are necessary, they are made at the end of the school year and implemented in the following school year. Changes in PSSA data will also inform this revision process and would need to be included in the following year plan and implementation as well.

- **Pennsylvania Value Added Assessment System (PVAAS)**: PVAAS is a measure of growth/progress and is intended to serve as a complement to existing achievement measures. By measuring the academic achievement of students and the academic progress of students, schools and districts will have a more robust and comprehensive picture of their effectiveness in raising student achievement. Valued-added analysis offers an objective and more precise way to measure student progress and the value schools and districts add to students' educational experiences.

- **Voluntary Model Curriculum**: Model curriculum will be available in all content areas beginning with mathematics. Frameworks will be available that provide conceptual organizers promoting and supporting the consistent application of “Big Ideas” – those core concepts that are essential for students to understand, in order to truly achieve. Content will be available at three levels: anchors-based, standards-based and beyond standards-based, which offers a differentiated approach to instructional design and delivery to meet the needs of a diverse student population.
• **Assessment Anchors:** This tool helps teacher, schools and districts align curriculum, instruction and assessment practices to the PSSA and the state’s academic content standards. Because the standards are sometimes too broad and too numerous to be the basis for meaningful decisions about curriculum and instruction, PDE developed Assessment Anchors. These anchors focus on a set of core standards that can be measured by a large-scale assessment; provide clear descriptions of standards are measured by the PSSA; define grade-appropriate expectations for each grade level and content area assessed; support a spiral flow of content-specific curricula from year to year; define a manageable set of content knowledge and skills for students; and provide eligible content at each grade level.

• **Adopt-an Anchor Program:** This program is a process for designing and implementing a “reading and mathematics across the curriculum” program at the secondary level that is focused on delivering instruction targeted to the assessment anchors. The program is based on the assumption that secondary math and English teachers cannot carry the entire load for meeting AYP goals in math and reading. Nor should content area teachers be overloaded with responsibility for delivering reading and math instruction that distracts from their own content instruction. Content area teachers are encouraged to find specific reading and mathematics assessment anchors that fit naturally with their curriculum and assume responsibility for teaching those anchors within the context of their regular content curriculum.

• **Pennsylvania Inspired Leadership Program (PIL):** The PIL program is a statewide, standards-based leadership development and support system for school leaders at all levels. The program is intended to build capacity among school leaders by focusing on what they need to know and do in order to guide and direct instructional improvement and improvements in student achievement. The program is based upon three core standards and six corollary standards, which form the basis for two different leadership programs: The Grow Program and The Support Program. The Grow Program is designed to address the three core leadership standards with principals and assistant principals with less than four years of experience. The curriculum and training is provided by certified National Institute for School Leadership (NISL) trainers. The Support Program is designed for experienced school district and intermediate unit administrators. The curriculum is based on the three core leadership standards as well as the six corollary standards. The curriculum and pedagogy is developed by the regional PIL sites. Eight regional PIL sites serve all school districts and intermediate units within the state.

• **Project 720 (High School Reform Model):** This program is a voluntary state grant program to create high schools that are student-centered, results-focused, data-informed and personalized in the delivery of services to students. All high schools participating in the program must sign on to a standardized high school reform agenda.

• **Classrooms for the Future:** Classrooms for the Future is about creating environments for deeper cognitive development through inquiry, real and relevant project-based learning, and differentiated instruction. Grant recipients will receive funding to purchase technology equipment, infrastructure, and support as delineated under Funding; however, the purposes of the Classrooms for the Future program are not to support technology acquisition but to foster 21st Century teaching and learning.

• **Dual Enrollment:** Dual enrollment allows students to take college courses and earn postsecondary credit while completing high school graduation requirements. State funds are provided to school districts to assist with the costs of providing these courses, with additional targeted funds available for low income districts.

• **Early College, Middle College and Gateway to College Programs:** As a subpart of the Dual Enrollment Program described above, this initiative will provide programs to support at-risk students who are not succeeding in their traditional high school environments and help them to finish high school and enter college. Participants will offer a more comprehensive set of postsecondary activities for students that allow them to graduate with a high-school diploma and substantial college credits, often by taking all of their courses on a college campus, thus re-engaging youth who might otherwise fail to pursue their academic aspirations.
• **Accountability Block Grant (ABG):** The Accountability Block Grant provides Pennsylvania school districts with financial assistance to implement effective educational practices and initiatives to improve student achievement in the core subject areas of math, literacy and science. Funds must be used by school districts to attain or maintain academic performance targets by establishing, maintaining or expanding one or more of 11 proven practices or programs such as full-day kindergarten, after school programs, pre-k programs and continuous professional development. In particular, the Block Grant can be used for operating expenditures associated with allowable programs, including staffing; technical assistance; learning materials and resources; travel and partnerships.

• **Academy for Urban Teaching:** A State grant program targeting minority youth in urban inner-city schools with the intent of interesting them in taking up teaching as a profession after high school graduation. High school students may apply during their sophomore and junior years.

• **College and Career Counseling Grants:** State grant program to create a student-centered 8-12 career development system for preparing high school graduates for college and career success. Focus is on enabling school counselors and teaching staff to focus on the interactions between students and their school with the expressed purpose of reducing the effects of environmental and institutional barriers that impede student academic success. The goal is for students to realize the importance of their academic preparation in relation to career, thus making them increasingly motivated to learn, to complete advanced courses and to complete high school.

**Professional Development Opportunities**

The majority of professional development offerings within the SSOSS in Pennsylvania are provided by and/or through one of the partners in the project—IU5s (either as part of the IU Capacity Building Program, or in conjunction with one of the programs, initiatives and tools described in the previous section), PaTANs, or various outside experts. PDE staff work to manage and oversee these various partners and projects, but because the capacity of PDE cannot adequately support the number of school districts and charter schools in the state, these partners carry out most of the activities throughout the state.

Below is a summary of the different professional development opportunities available to all schools within the Foundation Assistance tier of PA’s SSOSS:

• **Getting Results! Professional Development:** Through the IU Capacity Building project and under the management of PDE and the Delaware County IU 25, all 29 IUs are provided with the training and resources needed to train teams of school staff on data analysis, root cause analysis and the identification of solutions. Training is available to all schools, but is more targeted and focused in the 2nd and 3rd tiers of the model when schools enter into improvement and corrective action. Different materials have been developed for use by IUs and are updated on a continuing basis as new research becomes available and needs change.

• **Pennsylvania Value Added Assessment System (PVAAS) Training:** With leadership from the PDE, Harrisburg PaTAN and IU 13 provide statewide assistance and training to school districts on the proper use of PVAAS data and decision making using the data.

• **Pennsylvania Inspired Leadership (PIL) Professional Development:** A large component of the PIL program is professional development and support related to the three core and six corollary standards for leadership. The overall program provides curriculum, materials and resources as described under Programs, Initiatives and Tools, but the professional development portion of the program is ensures that participants have the necessary training and support to effectively complete the program and continue on as an effective instructional leader.
• **4 Sight Benchmark Assessments**: These assessments are formative and are given quarterly throughout the school year. The assessments are aligned with the PSSA and indicate how students would perform on the PSSA if it were given at these times during the school year. PDE offers free training primarily through PATTAN, but also through IUs for any district wishing to participate.

• **Center for Data Driven Reform in Education (CDDRE)**: The PDE has partnered with The Center for Data-Driven Reform in Education (CDDRE) to provide the following services to state, district, and school leadership teams through its Raising the Bar program: training in and coaching on using a data-driven decision-making process for planning and achievement; information on research-proven solutions to student achievement challenges; training in and coaching on instructional leadership and achievement monitoring.

• **Response to Intervention State Alignment & Support**: PA has established a state-level workgroup to provide overall direction and alignment within the standards-based system that has been built within the last four years. PA is one of the few states in the country that implements RTI as a general education strategy. Instructional practices in school-wide applications of progress monitoring, reading and behavior have been developed. Several pilot elementary sites were established to develop the data collection procedures and intervention protocols. Initial awareness training materials, statewide training with the 29 IUs and beginning secondary school implementation has been provided by the state RTI team.

• **PA Governor’s Institutes**: The PA Governor’s Institutes for Educators consist of a series of professional education programs designed to foster the creation of challenging learning environments. Programs are rich with opportunities to deepen subject area knowledge and include real-world experiences that help educators make the link to the Pennsylvania Academic Standards, reading and math (anchors), classroom assessments and technologies. The programs consist of two models: 1) Larger consolidated events for 400-600 educators in conference center settings lasting 3 days for which professional development hours are awarded, and 2) smaller week-long summer programs for 75-100 educators at higher education institutions, for which 2 graduate level academic credit hours are awarded.

**Model 1 Offerings:**

- Data Driven Decision Making
- Innovation in Education (HS Reform)
- Science/Technology/Engineering/Math (STEM)

**Model 2 Offerings:**

- Arts Education
- Improving School Climate
- Early Childhood Literacy
- Pre K/K Literacy
- Environment & Ecology
- ESL Strategies
- Health Safety and Physical Education
- Financial Education
- Reading, Writing, Speaking and Listening (CTE Program)
- Social Studies
- Urban Education
- World Languages

• **Online Professional Development**: PDE offers free courses to Pennsylvania educators, in accordance with the requirements of Act 48-1999 and Act 5-2006. A partnership with Learning Sciences International (LSI) provides courses to certified educators through its Online Professional Education Network (OPEN). The number of online course offerings is currently 38 including the new Classrooms for the Future series on 21st Century Teaching & Learning. These online courses provide access to job-embedded professional development activities for all educators. (All course content is reviewed and approved by the PDE prior to inclusion.)
• **PDE Professional Development & Support**: The SSOS is not only a system that involves many partners outside of PDE, but is also a cross-bureau PDE initiative. Many different bureaus, divisions and offices within PDE provide professional development, technical assistance and support to all schools around the various PDE initiatives and programs. For example, the Division of Federal Programs provides technical assistance, support and training regarding the use of federal funds to improve academic achievement while remaining in compliance with federal regulations; the Division of Professional Development provides support and technical assistance to school districts regarding the development and implementation of effective professional development plans; the Bureau of Accountability and Assessment provides training and support on the implementation of the PSSA and proper analysis of results; etc. All PDE programs, initiatives and tools have an assigned PDE office to provide management oversight, technical assistance and support.

• **PaTTAN Professional Development**: Three regional locations (Pittsburgh, Harrisburg and King of Prussia) provide ongoing training opportunities to help parents and educators maximize the achievement of all students, including students with disabilities. To better meet the needs of our participants, training opportunities are delivered via workshops, guided practice, seminars, statewide conferences, distance learning, videoconferences, online courses, etc.

By providing these strong Foundation Assistance programs that include funding, structured programs, tools and training in effective, research-proven practices, the SSOSS provides ALL schools and districts with the supports necessary to improve student achievement before it becomes problematic.

The Field-Based Assistance (Tier 2) level of supports in the SSOS provides more targeted, focused support to schools identified by the PSSA as School Improvement I or School Improvement II. A generalization of this level of support is that all of the supports provided at the Foundation Assistance level are now looked at more in-depth, more critically and more focused by school staff, administrators, PDE partners and PDE staff. For example, assistance provided through the IU Capacity Building program would ensure that school staff reviews data regarding the populations of students failing to make AYP targets and that solutions are chosen that will positively affect those populations of students.

In addition to more focused Foundation Assistance, new supports now become available at the Field-Based Assistance level as well. These Field-Based Assistance supports are provided mainly through the 29 IUs and PaTTAN regional support centers.

• **Education Assistance Program (EAP)**: This program is state-funded and requires school districts identified for improvement or higher to develop and implement tutoring programs for students failing to score at or above the proficient level on the PSSA. Program funds are provided through PDE and support and assistance is provided by 10-12 EAP Technical Assistants (TAs) who are assigned to provide direct support to all of the schools administering EAP programs. These EAP TAs work one-on-one with their assigned districts and schools to establish and implement effective tutoring programs.

• **IU Capacity Building Support—Field-Based Assistance (Level 2)**: At this level of the IU Capacity Building program, state funds are provided to LEAs for their schools identified for improvement or
corrective action ($9500 per building). As a typical first-choice partner to the District, IU’s are typically partnered with the districts via their Curriculum Coordinators who work with each school and district staff to determine how to use these funds in support of school improvement efforts. The funds may be used to pay for more intensive IU supports from the local IU or any other IUs that may have expertise in the areas of need. As well, funds may be used to access outside support. IU Curriculum Coordinators work more intensely with schools identified for improvement to develop review data, determine root causes and identify solutions. IU staff continue to support schools throughout the school year with training and assistance during the implementation of school improvement plans.

- **Title I School Improvement Funding:** Title I SI set aside funds are made available to all Title I buildings identified for School Improvement I or II. All schools in these levels of improvement received a “Base” allocation. These funds must be used to support the activities outlined within each schools’ approved school improvement plans.

- **Required Attendance at Model 1 Governor’s Institutes:** School districts with one or more schools in school improvement or higher are required to send school-based teams of educators (including building-level administrators) to the Data Driven Decision Making Governor’s Institute each summer. At this institute, participants will be involved in content sessions and data analysis session, both in the evening and during the day. The Data Driven Decision Making Governor’s Institute is facilitated by CDDRE staff, distinguished educators, EAP Technical Assistants, PDE and IU curriculum and special education advisors. At the conclusion of the institute, school-based teams are prepared to return to their schools and begin the process of developing an effective school improvement plan. (Depending on the subject and/or grade level needing improvement, school-based teams may also be required to attend the other Model 1 Governor’s Institutes on High School Reform and Science, Technology, Engineering and Math.)

- **Bureau of Teaching & Learning Supports:** When schools are identified for improvement, staff from the Division of Federal Programs, intensify the supports available to them. These supports include, but are not limited to, assistance in the development of school improvement plans, parent notification letters and budgets for required federal fund set asides. As well, staff in the Division of Continuous School and District Improvement provide technical assistance and support to schools regarding plan development and timelines for plan development, submission and implementation.

---

**Targeted Assistance:**
Tier 3 Supports

At the top of the three-tiered model that the SSOS system is based upon, the assistance to schools and districts is the most personalized and intensive. It is at this level of the system that schools in high levels of corrective action receive more customized, directed assistance from SSOS partners.

In addition to the supports available at the Foundation Assistance and Field-Based Assistance levels of the SSOS, these schools and districts are now afforded several new types of support and technical assistance.

- **Distinguished Educator Initiative (DE):** The PDE has developed the DE program to recruit, train and assign experienced educators to struggling schools and districts in planning and implementing
effective school reform efforts. Depending on the needs of the schools and districts to which they are assigned, DEs may serve as coaches or mentors for administrators, assist in the development of prescriptive solutions to student achievement problems and provide budget and financial assistance. DEs are assigned to schools for a minimum of a year and work one-on-one with school personnel as an integral participant in reform efforts.

- **Distinguished School Leaders Program (DSL):** The DSL program provides schools with experienced special educators to work directly with them if their IEP subgroup is the focus of school improvement efforts. These DSLs work out of the regional PaTTAN offices and are available to their assigned schools at any time. They work alongside the DEs as well, so that reform efforts are coordinated and complimentary.

- **IU Capacity Building Support—Targeted Assistance (Level 3):** In addition to Levels I and II supports to schools, schools in corrective action are awarded $10,000 in state funding. These funds are awarded to the schools’ local IU. The IU staff, DE, DSL and school administration must plan and coordinate the use of these funds to support their school improvement/reform efforts. PDE provides these teams with options for spending the funds to ensure that funds are spent in targeted ways to ensure student achievement. Throughout the planning process and the implementation process, IU staff, DEs, DSLs and school administrators provide support and assistance to schools and staff.

- **Title I School Improvement Funds:** In addition to Title I set aside funds allocated at the “Base” level, schools in corrective action also receive “Targeted” funds from this set aside. New Title I School Improvement Grant funds are also now available to schools in Corrective Action II (second year and higher) to supplement the Title I set aside funds. In the 2007-08 school year, the total amount of funds available to schools at the highest levels of corrective action exceeds $140,000.