

Glossary

Artifact: A piece of work or information, a record, or a report selected for inclusion in a school portfolio that provides evidence of the quality of the school's practices or resources in focus areas of interest to the school. Possible artifacts include school records, teacher assignments, newspaper articles, photos, videos, surveys, standardized-test scores, etc.

Data: A collection of individual pieces of information, used to draw a conclusion; facts or figures to be processed; evidence, records, statistics, etc., from which conclusions can be inferred.

Debrief: A structured conversation at the end of a process in which participants evaluate the process itself and discuss how it could be improved in the future.

Disaggregate: To sort data (e.g., test scores) about a large group (e.g., average scores for an entire school or district) into subcategories (e.g., test scores by race or ethnicity, gender, limited-English proficiency, etc.). Disaggregating data allows differences in performance by different subgroups of students or schools to become transparent instead of being buried among average figures.

Essential Question: A focusing question related directly to teaching and learning that drives an inquiry process. If answered "accurately," through the use of data, it will provide meaningful information for improving student achievement.

External Review: A multiple-day school visit by a group or team that is unaffiliated with the school to provide an outside perspective on and objective assessment of the school's efforts to help children achieve high standards.

External Review Team: A group of individuals, unaffiliated with the school, brought together to conduct an external review (see above).

External Review Team Report: The product of a school visit – a report from the external review team, based on its conclusions about school performance – that includes commendations, conclusions, and recommendations for school improvement.

Focus Areas: Aspects or elements of school operation that influence the effectiveness of teaching and learning and over which schools have some control.

Inquiry: A process of seeking truth or accurate information; an investigation or examination.

Internal Review: A self-study process by which a school reflects on its mission and goals, its practices and results, and its general operation through the collection, creation, and review of documents and other information.

Performance Indicators: Discrete descriptions of best practice within an operational standard, customarily presented in narrative form or in a rubric.

Protocol: A set of guidelines, agreed upon in advance by participants, that gives structure to a process such as a conversation or a classroom or school visit. The purpose of this structure is to focus activities, economize on time, and maintain a respectful atmosphere.

Rubric: An instrument outlining criteria or guidelines for clarifying expectations of student work and for evaluating student work; a narrative scale that describes levels of performance in a particular area, from strongest, or most desired, to weakest, or unacceptable.

School Improvement: The process of altering specific practices and policies in order to improve teaching and learning.

School-Improvement Process: A comprehensive accountability cycle that involves some form of ongoing school self-assessment, sometimes coupled with an outside review of the school.

School-Improvement Team (SIT): A group of people within a school who conduct and facilitate a school self-study through a cycle of inquiry and action.

School Portfolio: Collections of artifacts or work that document and demonstrate growth over time of a school community.

Self-Study Cycle: A process by which a school reflects on its mission and goals, its practices and results, and its general operation through the collection, creation, and review of documents and other information.

Stakeholder: A person or group that has a direct interest in the decision-making process of the school and its eventual success in assisting children to meet high standards. Such individuals and groups include, but are not limited to, students, parents and caregivers, business and community partners, school-site or local school board members, and funders.

Standard: A model of ideal performance or practice that can be used to measure one's own or others' performance or practice against.

Standards of Practice: Statements of best practice in a given area of school operation; a model to compare current school practice with.