NEW ENGLAND
SECONDARY SCHOOL
CONSORTIUM

GLOBAL BEST PRACTICES

Facilitators Guide

INTRODUCTION

Global Best Practices is an internationally benchmarked self-assessment tool developed by the New England Secondary School Consortium. This concise, user-friendly guide provides a selection of recommended facilitation strategies for educators who are using the resource to inform their school-improvement work and action planning, and it will help facilitators design purposeful, goal-driven activities for small- and large-group work sessions.

How to Use the Tool

Global Best Practices is organized into three sections (strands) and twenty subsections (dimensions) that address critical areas of school improvement. The tool was designed to equip schools with a thoughtful process for in-depth professional and organizational self-reflection. Since all effective school-improvement work is systemic, schools are encouraged to work through all twenty dimensions—yet the entire process does not need to be tackled all at once. Schools may start with a strand or a selection of dimensions that are particularly relevant to their action plan. The process can also be broken up over multiple months, semesters, or years. Keep in mind that the self-assessment process is not a perfect measure of school performance, but simply a useful guide for educators engaged in the complex and challenging work of school improvement.

Research Note

Global Best Practices is a research-based tool that draws upon both American and international research on effective education systems, schools, and instructional practices. While the presentation of this research is selective, efforts were made to focus on the highest-impact strategies and practices. For more information on the research consulted during the creation of the tool, see the *Global Best Practices Research Summary*.

How to Organize a Work Session

The first step in creating an effective *Global Best Practices* work session is to decide how it will be structured: who will be participating, how will they be grouped, what process will be employed, and how much time will be needed. While there are many ways to configure and organize a work session, the agenda described in this guide is designed for a full-faculty work session. But for schools that are completing the self-assessment in smaller groups or for shorter periods of time, the agenda will still provide a basic framework that can be modified as needed. When designing a work session, we have found the following general guidelines to be most efficient and productive:

1. **Determine the duration of the work session**, which will depend on the objectives of the session, the number of faculty members involved, and the dimensions selected. We recommend one of the following three options: full-day retreat (6 hours), half-day retreat (3 hours), or a series of three meetings (90 minutes each).
2. **Divide the faculty into small groups of four to eight members.** In larger groups, participants will have less time or fewer opportunities to speak; in smaller groups, the conversation may be less representative of diverse viewpoints. Strive to create balanced teams that represent multiple roles, content areas, or grade levels.
3. **Assign each group a dimension or selection of dimensions** based on the goals of the session, the number of participants, and the time allotted. The assignments should ensure that each dimension is completed by at least two different groups. For example, if your school intends to complete the Teaching and Learning strand during the work session, you can divide the faculty into twelve groups that each complete two dimensions—in this configuration, each of the eight dimensions will be completed three times by three separate groups.
4. **Give participants time to read each dimension independently and take notes.** Make sure that each participant has a copy of *Global Best Practices* and that they are given sufficient time to read and digest each dimension.

5. **Give participants time to engage in small-group discussions.** Reflective faculty discussions are one of the most important elements in the self-assessment process. In the absence of thoughtful discussions that consider a variety of evidence from multiple perspectives, resulting assessments and scores often tend to be less coherent and productive.
6. **Assign someone to record strategies and evidence for each group.** While participants will use their copy of Global Best Practices to take notes, each team should produce a completed dimension that summarizes the findings and viewpoints of the group.
7. **Each participant should score the completed dimensions independently**, and the scores should be tallied and averaged. When small groups arrive at a single consensus score through discussion, some participants will always feel as though the compromise score does not accurately reflect their personal assessment. When scores are tallied and averaged, every participant has a chance to score the dimension.
8. **Make sure to summarize the results of the session and distribute them to all participants in a timely fashion.** As a strategy for encouraging support and buy-in, facilitators should always produce a summary of findings and scores for participants, and then distribute them within 48 hours of the session. Facilitators should note that a digital—as opposed to paper-based—approach makes the process of collating findings and scores much less burdensome.

Sample Work Session Agenda

The following annotated facilitation agenda will help school leaders construct an effective *Global Best Practices* work session. This basic framework can be modified as needed to suit different needs and group configurations.

I. Welcome and Purpose of the Session

After welcoming the group, the facilitator should clearly state the purpose of the work session. For example:

> *The purpose of today's meeting is to introduce you to a new tool that will help us reflect on our teaching and learning practices.* Global Best Practices *is a research-based, self-assessment process that will help us diagnose our strengths and weaknesses, and then determine next steps for our school-improvement work. The tool will help us look at our practices in a new way and see some things we may not have seen before. As you know, we've been working over the past few years to raise our graduation rates and decrease some persistent achievement gaps, and today's session is a direct extension of that ongoing work. We hope to end the day with a clear direction and set of priorities for the coming school year.*

The following bulleted list can be used as a presentation slide to explain the purpose of the tool:

Global Best Practices *was created to:*

- *Promote a more global perspective in secondary schools.*
- *Distill hard-to-find research—on both American and international education systems—and make it more accessible to busy educators.*
- *Translate a selection of international best practices for an American audience and context.*
- *Help schools assess their relative performance in critical areas and develop focused, evidence-based improvement priorities.*
- *Provide a practical, comprehensive, step-by-step process that secondary educators can use to shape and* refine school-improvement plans.

II. Expected Outcomes

The facilitator should also provide a clear set of expectations and outcomes for the work session. For example:

Participants in this work session will:

- *Engage in a self-assessment process that will help our school determine where we are on a school-improvement continuum and what we need to do next.*
- *Identify high-priority objectives for the coming school year, including systemic issues that may help or hinder the implementation of our action plan.*
- *Leave with a stronger understanding of our collective practices and of research-based strategies that have been effective in other schools.*

III. Reviewing the Self-Assessment Process

To ensure that participants understand the process, the facilitator should ask everyone to read the directions described on pages 2–3 in the tool and answer questions. In our experience, facilitators often need to clearly describe the difference between strategies and evidence. For this purpose, the following definitions can be used:

1. STRATEGIES *are the organizational, instructional, or leadership practices that we are using as part of our school-improvement process. During this step, participants should only record strategies that are currently in place or in practice—not strategies we are considering or planning to implement.*
2. EVIDENCE *constitutes the objective data and outcomes that show our school-improvement strategies have had a positive impact on student performance in our school. Evidence includes student-performance data (graduation rates, assessment scores, behavioral trends, etc.) and other forms of concrete evidence that can be confirmed by multiple individuals and supported by several specific examples (for example, "teacher collaboration has increased" could be considered evidence if a faculty is meeting in professional learning groups every month and several new team-taught, interdisciplinary courses were recently introduced). Participants should not record subjective perceptions or anticipated evidence that may result from strategies that have not yet been implemented.*

FACILITATORS NOTE: *Global Best Practices* was created to promote evidence-based school improvement—i.e., action plans that are based on hard data and objective assessments of practice. For this step, it is essential that schools record concrete evidence of effective or ineffective practices. Without sound evidence as a guide, schools can spend years investing in programs and strategies that produce little or no tangible benefit for students or staff. That said, collecting, tracking, and analyzing concrete indicators of school and student performance is a challenging undertaking, and many schools are not equipped with the systems, tools, or in-house expertise they may need to use data effectively. If your school does not have ready access to the data it needs to create an evidence-based action plan, we strongly recommend incorporating the development of such data systems into the action plan itself.

IV. Small-Group Work Sessions

After dividing the faculty into teams, the facilitator should reiterate the purpose of the activity. For example:

> *For the next sixty minutes, each team is going to work through two dimensions in the tool, but collectively we will complete all eight dimensions in the Teaching and Learning strand by the end of today's session. The purpose of this activity is to take a hard look at our current practices before we begin mapping out ways to improve them. Keep in mind that the performance descriptions you will read are merely concise, illustrative snapshots of a school at various stages of development. Don't get bogged down in the details of the descriptions, but consider the overall picture they present. The most important thing is that we all engage in a thoughtful, honest, objective discussion about our current practices, and then score ourselves accordingly so we can begin determining our most important priorities. This is what we are going to do…*

FACILITATORS NOTE: At this point, it would also be good to introduce and review **ground rules or norms** designed to keep the small-group discussions focused and productive. We have found the following norms to be helpful: *respect time, allow everyone's voice to be heard, listen attentively, respect differences in opinion and viewpoint, assume positive intentions, maintain a speakers list, freely attend to personal needs, foster openness and good humor*.

Sample Instructions

The following instructions can be displayed for the small groups:

1. *Break up into your assigned groups and select a recorder for the session.*
2. *Independently read the first assigned dimension and record the strategies and evidence you have knowledge of in the spaces provided. (10 minutes)*
3. *As a group, discuss the dimension and record relevant strategies and evidence. The group's recorder will complete a single dimension that will be turned in to the facilitator at the end of the session. (20 minutes)*
4. *After recording strategies and evidence, each team should discuss where they feel our school is on the performance continuum described in the dimension. (15 minutes)*

FACILITATORS NOTE: We recommend that groups be given a minimum of 30 minutes to complete a dimension—although 45 minutes is preferred, especially the first time participants work through a dimension. The facilitator should also build in time to answer any questions that might arise during the process. We strongly recommend focusing on depth over breadth and limiting the session to 60 or 90 minutes before giving participants a break. It's better to engage in a longer and more substantive discussion of two or three dimensions than a relatively cursory discussion of several. Again, make sure each one of the assigned dimensions is completed by at least two different teams.

V. Gallery Walk

For this session, facilitators can choose a paper-based or digital approach. While the process described below uses chart paper, facilitators should strongly consider using computers, LCD projectors, and online applications (such as Google Docs or wikis) to streamline the presenting, collating, and distributing process. The following instructions are an overview of a basic gallery walk:

1. During the group discussions, the recorders for each team should transcribe the strategies and evidence identified by the group onto chart paper.
2. Following the discussions, the summaries for each group are hung up around the room and grouped by dimension. Accompanying each dimension is a 1–5 scoring grid on a separate sheet of chart paper.
3. Each participant is given markers or stickers (colored dots work well) that they will use to record their individual score in each dimension.
4. Participants conduct a gallery walk to review the collected strategies and evidence, and then assign a score for each dimension by placing a mark or sticker on the scoring grid.
5. When finished, the facilitator quickly adds up the scores and produces an average score for each completed dimension. The scores are then displayed on a slide or chart paper for the entire group in advance of the closure and debrief.

VI. Closure and Debrief

At this point, the facilitator should debrief the day with the faculty. A basic "warm" and "cool" feedback approach works well. Thank everyone for participating and briefly outline next steps—how the self-assessment process will inform the school action plan, who will lead this work, when the draft action plan will be completed and distributed to the faculty, etc. To maintain transparency and inclusivity, we recommend providing participants with a written summary of the day's notes, including copies of the completed planning worksheets.

ABOUT THE NEW ENGLAND SECONDARY SCHOOL CONSORTIUM

The New England Secondary School Consortium is a pioneering regional partnership committed to fostering forward-thinking innovations in the design and delivery of secondary education across the New England region. The five partner states of Connecticut, Maine, New Hampshire, Rhode Island, and Vermont believe that our bold vision, shared goals, and innovative strategies will empower us to close persistent achievement gaps, promote greater educational equity and opportunity for all students, and lead our educators into a new era of secondary schooling. The Consortium's goal is to ensure that every public high school student in our states receives an education that prepares them for success in the colleges, careers, and communities of the 21st century.

From the schoolhouse to the statehouse, the Consortium is working to develop and support bold educational strategies that empower the next generation of citizens, workers, and leaders to be prosperous and knowledgeable participants in our global community. The members of the Consortium recognize that the traditional ways of educating students are no longer aligned with today's civic and professional expectations, and that the time has come to rethink the traditional high school experience on a regional scale. By building equitable systems of public secondary education in each of the five partner states, the Consortium plans to make the knowledge, skills, and habits of mind that were once the possession of a few the universal standard for all. To this end, the Consortium will support the development of high-performing, internationally competitive schools and educational experiences that will better mirror the lives and learning needs of today's students. No longer limited by building design, geography, or educational convention, we envision these high-performing schools becoming versatile community learning centers that prioritize individual learning needs, blend secondary and postsecondary experiences, provide engaging educational opportunities both inside and outside the classroom, and offer a variety of student-designed pathways to graduation—all while emphasizing global understanding, multicultural awareness, technological literacy, real-world applications, and other challenging 21st century skills.

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