

**New Jersey Department of Education
Peer Review Process for the Title I Unified Plan
as Required for Schools in Need of Improvement and Schools Operating
Approved Schoolwide Programs**

Background

The *No Child Left Behind Act of 2001* (NCLB) mandates that all students must meet proficiency by 2014. To attain this goal, New Jersey schools must meet proficiency benchmarks, making adequate yearly progress (AYP). Title I Schools that miss their AYP targets for two or more consecutive years in the same content area (language arts literacy/mathematics) go into improvement status. Title I schools identified as in need of improvement (SINI) must apply certain sanctions (school choice, supplemental educational services, technical assistance) including the development of a Title I Unified Plan, which serves as their school improvement plan.

The Title I Unified Plan is also required for schools operating approved schoolwide programs or schools applying for schoolwide status. All required schoolwide elements are incorporated into the Unified Plan. All schools operating approved schoolwide programs, as well as SINIs, must complete all required components of the Unified Plan, including a peer review.

The Unified Plan must be developed in consultation with parents, school staff, the district, and outside experts [NCLB §1116(b)(3)(A)] and submitted in accordance with the time frames identified in the document “Process for Submitting the Title I Unified Plan.” This document, along with the Unified Plan template and instructions for completing the plan are provided on the NJDOE Web site as an NCLB Consolidated Application planning document at www.nj.gov/education/grants/entitlement/nclb/. A Unified Plan for each SINI or school operating a schoolwide program must be uploaded to the EWEG system for the district’s NCLB application to be considered “substantially approvable.”

According to the United States Department of Education *LEA and School Improvement Non-Regulatory Guidance*, the Unified Plan must be submitted for peer review, using a process established by the district. The peer review team is composed of “teachers and administrators from higher-performing schools or districts similar to the one in improvement, but significantly more successful in meeting the learning needs of their students.” Reviewers with “demonstrated effectiveness and recognized expertise in school improvement” evaluate the plan’s quality and likelihood of success, and make suggestions for revisions. The peer review must be conducted within 45 days of the plan’s submission to the district. After the review, the district works with the school to make necessary revisions and approves the completed plan.

Benefits of Collaboration

Schools undergoing peer review can expect to benefit from the expertise of educators from higher-performing schools and districts. The peer review team will draw on their

successful experiences in the classroom, share information about winning instructional strategies and programs, and offer guidance in areas that need attention. Schools can implement the activities that team members have used to improve academic achievement in their own schools and districts. Since they are from schools or districts similar to the one in improvement status, the sharing of ideas is more likely to bring about positive change.

Peer Review Process Elements

To help districts establish and execute a peer review process, the Office of Student Achievement and Accountability has developed the following process elements and evaluation form. Districts are not bound to use this process; however, the New Jersey Department of Education recommends this process. If this process is not used, a comparable process must be substituted that incorporates all required NCLB peer review process elements.

Composition of the Peer Review Team

Each peer review team will be composed of at least three teachers and administrators from higher-performing schools and districts similar to the one being reviewed. For example, team members for SINIs should be chosen based on their experience with school improvement issues and expertise in the content area(s) where students underperformed. Team members may be from schools either within the district or from other districts, but may not be from the school being peer reviewed or from another SINI.

The Peer Review Process

- **Preparation:** The school and/or district will provide each peer review team member with a copy of the school's Unified Plan, the school's needs assessment and priority problem description, and the school's assessment results, along with any additional pertinent documentation. The plan and documentation must be such to convince an experienced professional that the school will implement the required elements of the Unified Plan according to the intent of NCLB. The material should be organized so that the team can conduct an efficient review. For example, evidence to accompany each required element in the Unified Plan should be identified and include a brief narrative explaining its purpose.

A district representative should be selected to interface with the peer review team, when required. This representative is responsible for assisting the team in obtaining adequate and appropriate information for the review.

- **Review Team:** A liaison will be selected from the team to interface with the district/school on all issues relevant to the peer review, including requests for additional information and submission of the report.

Teams should employ the following steps to conduct the peer review:

- Each member of a peer review team reads the entire submitted proposed Unified Plan and other documents, formulating any questions for clarification or requests for additional information.
- Reviewers provide their expert professional judgment based on the plan and other materials submitted and offer suggestions for improving the plan. Feedback should be constructive with examples provided, when possible.
- After team members review the plan, the team meets to discuss their recommendations and record a consensus report, which is presented to the district.

- **Review Criteria:** The Unified Plan must include all required elements as defined by NCLB. (Teams can use the attached evaluation form to direct their review of the required elements.) The review of the Unified Plan is evaluated against the required elements. Reviewers should also judge the plan elements on their likelihood of success.

Team members should offer concrete suggestions, when feasible, and draw on their own background and expertise to help the school refine its plan for improving the academic proficiency of its students. Suggestions should be presented as options rather than prescriptive instructions. Feedback should be informative and consistent with professional standards and best practices.

- **Submission of Report:** The team's report is the compilation of the recommendations of the team members. There should be consensus among the team members. The report evaluates whether the school meets the particular required elements based on the totality of the plan and submitted documentation. A written report of the team's recommendations is submitted to the district by the liaison. The report should include a brief statement of the degree to which the plan meets the NCLB requirements and the changes needed. More detail and suggestions are included for each required element. Peer review team members should be available, if necessary, to clarify their suggestions.

The peer review report should be kept on file at the central office so that it is available upon request by the NJDOE during a monitoring or review of the Title I Unified Plan.

- **Plan Revisions and Approval:** The district works with the school to make revisions based on the peer review. When the Unified Plan meets the requirements of the statute and regulations, the district approves the plan. For newly designated SINIs, the school must implement the plan as soon as possible, preferably within the school year when the school was identified for improvement, but no later than the beginning of the following school year [NCLB §1116(b)]. For schools operating schoolwide programs, the plan is applied at the start of the NCLB project period (September 1).

Time Frame for Review

The peer review process must be completed within 45 days of the submission of the Unified Plan, as required by NCLB.

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**Title I Unified Plan
Peer Review Team Evaluation Form**

Plan Elements	Questions to Guide Review	Plan Compliance	Recommendations
<p>The School Unified Plan Committee must include the following members:</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Parents • School staff • District representatives • Outside experts 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Have parents with children in different grades been included? • Have content specialists, teachers, and administrators been included? • Have outside experts been included? 		
<p>Has a comprehensive needs assessment been conducted that includes multiple methods?</p>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Are assessment data used that include both state and district assessment tools? • Are teacher and parent surveys employed? • Have all stakeholder groups been asked for input? • How are multiple and diverse data compiled and incorporated? 		
<p>What strategies, programs and/or activities does the Unified Plan include to address each of the following areas:</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Teaching and learning in core academic subjects • Professional development • Technical assistance • Parent involvement 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Are programs identified that address deficiencies? • Are programs research-based? • Are professional development activities planned that address identified deficiencies? • Is technical assistance described that addresses identified deficiencies? • Have parent involvement activities been described? 		
<p>Indicate the plan's measurable</p>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Have realistic goals been set 		

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<p>goals for each of the following areas:</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Teaching and learning in core academic subjects • Professional development • Technical assistance • Parent involvement 	<p>that can be measured to show improvement?</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Are goals described for teaching strategies and student achievement of core subjects? How will success be measured? • Are the positive results of professional development activities measurable? Are the goals described sufficiently? • Are achieved results from technical assistance measurable? How will they be measured and what are the expected results? • Can parental involvement activities be measured for student success? Are the goals identified? 		
<p>Describe the scientifically based research used to support the plan's strategies, programs and/or activities for teaching and learning in the core academic subjects?</p>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Scientifically based programs and activities are described/identified. • Scientifically based instructional strategies are described/identified. • Has the plan described how these will be implemented within the school? • Do these programs address the school's identified priority problems? 		
<p>What extended day and/or extended year programs and activities, as appropriate, does</p>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Have extended school programs and activities been 		

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<p>the plan include to address teaching and learning in the core academic subjects?</p>	<p>described?</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Are these programs and activities geared to the core subjects? • Do these programs target students from subgroups that have not met AYP standards? • Are the scientifically based programs/strategies used? 		
<p>Describe the professional development activities that will be implemented to address:</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> • The teaching and learning process to increase content knowledge • The use of scientifically based instructional strategies in core academic subjects • The alignment of classroom activities with academic content standards and assessments • Training to analyze classroom and school-level data to inform instruction 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Will professional development help improve students' academic progress? • Does professional development address scientifically based strategies? • Do professional development activities focus on closing the achievement gap? • Are data analysis activities included in the professional development plan? • Is the professional development plan described in sufficient detail? • Have professional development activities focused on priority problems identified in the needs assessment? 		
<p>What strategies are used to</p>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Are all teachers in the 		

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recruit and retain highly qualified staff?	<p>school highly qualified?</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Are significant measures employed to fill vacancies? • Is there an incentive or reward system to aid retention? 		
What provisions are in the Unified Plan to support high-quality, structured mentoring of new teachers?	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Has a mentoring program been described? • Will the program provide sufficient support for new teachers? • Are mentoring activities meaningful and of sufficient frequency for success? 		
What steps will the school take to increase parent involvement?	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Are communications methods in place between the school and the parents? • Have new strategies been described? • Are measurable goals defined for increasing parent involvement? 		
<p>Have individuals been identified to implement and monitor the following:</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Teaching and learning in core academic subjects • Professional development • Technical assistance • Parent involvement 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Have individuals been assigned appropriately? • Is there a reporting process to ensure that implementation is occurring as scheduled? 		
What resources will be allocated and/or reallocated to support implementation of the	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Are <i>school</i> resources described that will sufficiently implement the 		

Plan Elements	Questions to Guide Review	Plan Compliance	Recommendations
school improvement plan?	plan? <ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Are <i>district</i> resources described that will sufficiently implement the plan? • Are elements of the plan impossible to implement due to lack of resources? 		
Have other recommendations and plans been incorporated, if available?	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Are CAPA recommendations incorporated? • Are corrective actions identified and included? • Are restructuring options identified and being implemented? 		
Explain the responsibilities of the district and the NJDOE in implementing the plan and providing, or providing for, technical assistance.	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • What technical assistance is the district providing to the school? • What technical assistance is the NJDOE providing to the school? 		