



## School Improvement Panel (SciP) Guidance 1.0

Collaboration enhances the quality of complex work like educator evaluation and professional development. Through New Jersey's evaluation pilots and the first year of AchieveNJ implementation, districts that prioritized collaboration and open communication reported greater success with new practices and activities and with responding to various challenges along the way. The School Improvement Panel (SciP) is one important vehicle for fostering such collaboration in each school.

### Background

In addition to its revisions to educator evaluation and tenure policy in New Jersey, the [TEACHNJ Act](#) includes several provisions in support of teachers' ongoing professional growth and development. One requirement is that all schools convene a SciP to provide leadership in the areas of teacher professional development, mentoring, and evaluation. The SciP is not the sole body responsible for implementation of these systems and programs, but plays a significant role in coordinating initiatives and ensuring the consistent application of requirements across the school. The SciP can help ensure that teachers:

- receive useful feedback on their practice and their students' learning outcomes,
- experience high-quality professional learning and mentoring support,
- receive up-to-date information on key initiatives, and
- are given a respected voice in decision-making.

Given the scope and diversity of New Jersey's schools, the Department of Education ("the Department") recognizes the importance of local flexibility in implementing the panels. At the same time, many educators have requested more guidance and information about the effective use of SciPs. Based on input from educators and other stakeholders across the state who shared their practices, the Department has developed this guidance for districts and schools. To share feedback on the contents and usefulness of this resource, as well as any other suggestions, examples, or information from local SciPs, please email [TeachPD@doe.state.nj.us](mailto:TeachPD@doe.state.nj.us). Please also check the [Professional Development SciP Web Page](#) and the [AchieveNJ SciP Page](#) for additional resources.

State requirements for SciPs are listed below, followed by **suggested activities, examples, and resources to help schools and districts convene effective panels; unless otherwise noted, their use is not mandated by the Department**. Please use the links below to access major sections of the document:

- [SciP Requirements](#)
- [Data Use and Confidentiality Concerns](#)
- [Suggestions for SciP Implementation and Examples from New Jersey Educators](#)
  - [SciP Composition and Structure](#)
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  - [Supporting the District's Mentoring Program](#)
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- [Appendix A](#): Optional calendar of activities for the school year
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### SciP Requirements

#### Membership

- The SciP must include the school principal, an assistant/vice principal or a designee if the school does not have one, and a teacher.
- More staff members may be added to the SciP, provided that teachers represent *at least one-third* of the total membership.

- The principal has final responsibility for SciP membership but must consult with the local association representative in determining a suitable teacher to participate.
- As of 2015-16, teachers serving on SciPs must have earned a rating of Effective or Highly Effective in the most recent evaluation. Until then, the teacher must meet local standards for having “a demonstrated record of success in the classroom.”
- The teacher member(s) will serve for a full academic year but may not be appointed for more than three consecutive years.
- The initial formation of SciPs was required by February 1, 2013; moving forward, these panels must be established in each school by August 31 each year.

### **Responsibilities**

SciP members may:

- Identify professional development opportunities for instructional staff members based on aggregate school evaluation and student performance data and other information.
- Oversee the mentoring of new teachers at the building level and support implementation of the district’s mentoring plan.
- Ensure that the evaluation process is completed for all teachers. The SciP teacher may only conduct evaluations if:
  - The local association representative agrees,
  - The principal of the teacher being evaluated agrees, and
  - The teacher holds the appropriate supervisory certificate, and
  - The teacher does not concurrently serve as a mentor for a novice teacher in the school.
- Support quality implementation of Corrective Action Plans for teachers rated Partially Effective or Ineffective – including a mid-year evaluation and additional observation – as required.

### **Data Use and Confidentiality Concerns**

The Department encourages SciPs to use a variety of data sources to inform their work. However, the protection of teacher and student confidentiality rights should be a key consideration. By law, evaluation data of a particular employee must remain confidential (*N.J.S.A. 18A:6-120.d* and *121.d*; *N.J.A.C. 6A:10-1.4*). Districts must store evaluation data in each teacher's personnel file or in another secure manner that is easily accessible to the teacher (either electronically or on paper). In general, teacher data should be handled in the secure manner one would treat, handle, and store any part of a confidential personnel record and should not be released to the public.

SciP members should apply the following basic principles of confidentiality:

- Evaluation data such as scores, reviews, and summative ratings should not be publicly linked to individual teaching staff members, nor should such information be shared with unapproved colleagues (e.g., SciP teachers not preauthorized to conduct evaluations).
- If the teacher serving on the SciP does not have the approval of the majority representative to participate in individualized evaluation activities, teachers’ names in observation data and forms should be expunged. Under the same circumstances, the teacher should not participate in any discussion of an individual teacher’s evaluation.
- Individual student-level data may not be shared publicly.
- Evaluation data and student achievement data may be shared and used in aggregated form, across groups of staff or students, as long as individual confidentiality is maintained.
- Professional conversations between mentors and novice teachers (mentees) for the purposes of mentee support must remain confidential.
- Logs of mentor activities should be shared between the mentor and the district central office and not with the SciP.

## Suggestions for SciP Implementation and Examples from New Jersey Educators

Within the broad guidelines specified above, many variations in roles and activities for the SciP are possible. Feedback from a small sample of principals and district administrators from activities in 2013-14 revealed how they have adapted the panels to their local needs. Their examples have been included in the suggestions below. *Please note this list is not comprehensive of all potential SciP activities, and none of the recommendations below are mandated by the state.*

### SciP Composition and Structure

**The Department encourages schools to include more than one teacher on the SciP as appropriate; however, the membership need not be the same for each school in a district.**

- In consultation with the majority representative, the principal may select teacher members for the SciP in a number of ways. For example, teachers may be invited to volunteer for the role, the faculty may make recommendations, or the principal may invite particular individuals. Teachers already serving in leadership roles – such as department heads or mentor coordinators – are natural candidates.
- Among Montclair’s seven elementary schools, each SciP has a principal and a vice-principal or other administrative team member, but some schools have two teacher members while others have three.
- In Haddonfield, which has maintained its district professional development committee<sup>1</sup>, the teachers chosen for the SciPs were standing members of that committee.
- At Montgomery High School, teachers on the SciP were invited to participate by the administration. The criteria for selection included demonstrating strong instructional practices in the classroom, the confidence to share their thoughts and input with the committee, and the ability to provide feedback to other teachers.

“I would **broaden the base of the SciP team by increasing the number of teachers involved.** The building principal will remain in the veto position, but you need the inputs of more than one person from a faculty perspective.”

~Dr. Michael Gorman, Superintendent,  
Pemberton Township

“I invited teachers to participate **whose instruction I respected, who had the respect of their colleagues, and who had the confidence to dialogue openly with the administrators** on the committee.”

~Dr. Brian Brotschul, Principal, Linwood  
Middle School, North Brunswick Township

**The Department suggests that SciPs meet at the beginning of each school year to set norms, schedules, and priorities and then continue to meet at least quarterly throughout the year based on local needs and activities.**

- Districts might consider other meeting demands to determine the appropriate number and duration of SciP meetings. For example, SciPs might meet every two months, alternating with the meetings of the District Evaluation Advisory Committee (DEAC). When SciPs and DEACs are collaborating, this approach allows sharing of information across the committees and might avoid duplicating some work.

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<sup>1</sup> As of July 2013, state requirements for PD committees at the district and school levels were removed. Now, chief school administrators and principals have the flexibility to organize their respective systems of PD. While some schools have maintained a PD committee distinct from the SciP, most are in the process of replacing the former committee with the SciP.

## Identifying Professional Development Opportunities for Teachers

**The Department suggests that ScIPs analyze aggregate evaluation data according to the instructional elements of the district's teaching practice instrument, and then use the findings to prioritize short-term professional learning activities and long-term PD planning.** This was the most common ScIP activity reported by educators in 2013-14.

- In Pemberton, data from observations identified teachers' use of formative assessments as an area for growth. The ScIPs organized an opportunity during a faculty meeting to allow teachers to spend time examining that aspect of the Danielson rubric and discussing examples of what a Level 4 rating would look like in practice. More workshops deriving from observation data began to take place during faculty meetings over the course of the year.
- Summary data from teacher observations at Montgomery High School were examined over each component of the Danielson framework. Areas identified for additional teacher support, such as questioning techniques and student discussion, will be incorporated into the school's PD plan for the next year. This process allows PD planning to be more strategic than in the past.

**In addition to teacher evaluation data, ScIPs can use other valuable sources of information to identify professional learning needs.** For example, needs assessments can be conducted by surveying teachers, teachers can do self-analyses against the district evaluation frameworks, and various types of student formative assessment data can inform the planning process.

- At Linwood Middle School in North Brunswick Township, the ScIP helped identify teacher support needs by triangulating data from three primary sources:
  1. Aggregate teacher observation data aligned with the Danielson framework,
  2. Student learning data from the district's online formative assessment data system, and
  3. Data collected via frequent classroom walk-throughs.
- Woodstown-Pilesgrove Regional conducted an analysis of teacher PD plans as well as McREL self-assessments in coordinating possible PD needs. The schools analyzed major trends in their ScIPs, assisting supervisors who could then identify materials for teacher support appropriate to their respective content areas.

**As they work to support teachers in their professional growth, ScIP members should become familiar with the state's [Standards for Professional Learning](#). The Department suggests that ScIPs add a review of these standards to a ScIP meeting agenda.** These standards outline the characteristics of professional learning that leads to more effective teaching practice for improved student learning.

## Supporting the District's Mentoring Program

**The Department suggests that SciPs review the district mentoring plan, consider ways to support the plan at the school level, and take steps to ensure that all new teachers are receiving the necessary professional supports.** The *TEACHNJ Act* requires that all new, first-year teachers receive professional support, whether they are novices entering the profession for the first time, or experienced teachers who are moving to a new district. In particular, novice teachers serving under a provisional certificate are required to have an experienced teacher as an individual mentor.

- Although much of the responsibility for new teacher orientation and induction is typically handled at the district level, SciP members can help support new teachers in many ways. Some specific suggestions include:
  - Know new teachers' names and assignments;
  - Convene mentors and new teachers together for common professional learning activities;
  - Meet with mentors and/or new teachers once per semester or year as appropriate;
  - Use existing data or create data collection processes to tailor supports for new teachers;
  - Ensure appropriate confidentiality, conduct a focus group or survey of mentors and mentees at the end of the year to collect feedback and consider ways to improve induction in the future; and
  - Model a positive, collegial school culture and serve as a source of information and encouragement.
- The SciP at Biotechnology High School in the Monmouth County Vocational School District took on a specific role this past year. The district has a new teacher mentoring plan and a cadre of mentor teachers by subject area. The SciP took the district's mentoring plan and then worked backwards from what they determined new teachers need to know from a policy, procedural and cultural standpoint. This is a one way a SciP can support the district's mentoring program without interfering in the confidential nature of the mentor-mentee relationship.

**"We customize the district mentoring policy and personalize it to our school,** considering anomalies of process and culture. The SciP chunks information that new teachers need to know and communicates pieces of it on a monthly basis so that it is not overwhelming."

~Dr. Linda Eno, Principal, Biotechnology High School, Monmouth County Vocational

**SciPs should devote special attention to teachers who join the faculty after the beginning of the school year.** Such teachers may have missed important preparatory meetings and might need support adjusting to their new assignment.

- Morris-Union Jointure Commission's Developmental Learning Center in New Providence added a replacement teacher during the year when another teacher had to take a long-term leave. In that instance, the teacher on the SciP supported the replacement teacher through the remainder of the year, even though the SciP teacher was not serving in the formal one-to-one mentoring role. The district plan for mentoring leave replacement teachers includes an initial meeting, an early observation by the supporting teacher, additional meetings and teleconferences on a weekly basis, and a list of important topics to address.

**The SciP should consider ways to support mentors in addition to new teachers.**

- SciPs can support mentor teachers in the school by developing procedures to ensure that their training, information, and resource needs are being addressed. They can also assist in arranging schedules and substitute coverage so that mentors and mentees can observe each other's classrooms as well as classrooms of other teachers.

## Ensuring Quality Implementation of Evaluations and Corrective Action Plans

### The Department suggests that ScIP members support the training, observation, and administrative tasks required to implement AchieveNJ at the school level.

- The ScIP can ensure that all school staff have received the necessary training on the district’s teaching practice instrument, especially teachers new to the district.
- In some cases, the ScIP may assist in the scheduling of observations and conferences and may monitor whether the schedule is being followed.
- ScIP members might meet with first-year teachers during the first semester to make certain they understand the district’s practice instrument and evaluation system.
- The ScIP can provide a broad range of support and resources on evaluation components, including Student Growth Percentiles and Student Growth Objectives, and address misunderstandings or misinformation in a systematic way.

### The ScIP can work with aggregate and/or anonymous evaluation data to make recommendations for related supports.

- The ScIP at Montgomery Township High School analyzed aggregate teacher evaluation data to assess the consistency of ratings across evaluators and then shared the data with faculty.
- As long as the number of teachers is large enough to maintain anonymity, ScIPs might look at subgroups of teacher scores (e.g. comparison of grade level teacher groups in elementary schools or departments in high schools). This may reveal that a grade-level group of teachers is excelling on particular elements and that their knowledge could be shared with the rest of the faculty.
- The ScIPs may also invite all observers in the school to review aggregate data with the ScIP. Such a review can be used to inform discussion about the challenges and successes of the observation process within a school.
- At Linwood Middle School in North Brunswick Township, a particular approach based on data from instructional rounds<sup>2</sup> has been used to allow ScIP teachers to help administrators address instructional issues without violating confidentiality.
  - Classroom walk-throughs to learn about instruction are regularly conducted in the school, mostly by administrators but with some teacher participation, as appropriate.
  - As part of a focus on questioning skills, the observers rated teachers’ questions on a four-point scale of complexity and rigor based on Bloom’s Taxonomy. An examination of 1,500 data points showed that only 15% of questions asked had been rated at the scale’s two highest levels.
  - Administrators used this data set to formulate a case study. The ScIP team discussed the case and then made recommendations for instructional interventions to increase the number of higher-level questions.
  - This case study process is a regular part of ScIP meetings and maintains the ScIP’s focus on teaching and learning.

**“Teachers were able to see that evaluators were consistent with ratings, and that added more value to what we had to say. It was important for them to see that we were consistent.”**

~Ms. Corie Gaylord, Assistant Principal  
Montgomery High School

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<sup>2</sup> More information can be found in: City, E., Elmore, R., Fiarman, S. and Teitel, L. (2009). Instructional Rounds in Education: A Network Approach to Improving Teaching and Learning. Boston: Harvard Education Publishing Group. <http://hepg.org/hep-home/books/instructional-rounds-in-education>

## Supporting Effective Communications

**ScIPs should support ongoing, two-way communications with the rest of the school and district community to promote a common understanding of the policies and procedures related to the areas of ScIP engagement.**

- The Department recommends that at least one member of each ScIP attend DEAC meetings. Whether the principal or another ScIP member should fill this role is up to the district. The primary goals are to share important information from the DEAC with school staffs (by way of faculty meetings or other means) and to provide feedback from the schools back to the DEAC.
- After each meeting, ScIPs can disseminate a communication (email, short newsletter) summarizing meeting items and describing next steps.
- ScIPs can develop online surveys, email, etc. to encourage staff to share their ideas, concerns, and solutions and gather this educator feedback once or twice during the year at a minimum.
- ScIP members can communicate with teachers through a variety of media, including the school/district website, newsletters and emails, etc. In consultation with the chief school administrator, ScIP members might consider expanding their communications beyond their teaching community to parents, school boards, and the broader community.

## An Evolving Role

**The ScIP has the potential to play a central role in supporting the instructional mission of the school by contributing to improved teacher effectiveness; however, the realization of this potential will undoubtedly take time.**

- All the school leaders who have shared feedback and examples candidly acknowledged that their ScIPs are still in development. Although they plan to continue building the ScIP's responsibilities, they have deliberately strengthened the role of the panel over time to give their school communities time to adjust to the ScIP and for the ScIP to adjust to the school's needs.
- As ScIPs develop, the Department will continue to learn from New Jersey educators and identify additional promising practices in later versions of this guidance.

## Acknowledgements

The Department is grateful for the efforts of the following educators, who offered insights and examples to inform this guidance:

- Dr. Brian Brotschul, Principal, Linwood Middle School, North Brunswick Township School District
- Dr. Linda Eno, Principal, Biotechnology High School, Monmouth County Vocational School District
- Ms. Corie Gaylord, Assistant Principal, Montgomery High School, Montgomery Township School District
- Dr. Julie Gardner, Principal, Developmental Learning Center-New Providence, Morris-Union Jointure Commission
- Dr. Michael Gorman, Superintendent, Pemberton Township School District
- Mr. Peter Mazzagatti, Instructional Facilitator for Language Arts/Social Studies/Humanities, Woodstown-Pilesgrove Regional School District
- Dr. Janet Parmelee, Superintendent, Morris-Union Jointure Commission
- Dr. Gino Priolo, Director of Special Education, Haddonfield Public Schools
- Ms. Michelle Russell, Chief Talent Officer, Montclair Public Schools
- AchieveNJ Advisory Committee

## Appendix A: Suggested Calendar of SCIP Activities

A SCIP might consider pursuing activities according to this calendar.

August	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>Finalize membership on SCIP by August 31.</li> </ul>
September	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>Hold start of school year SCIP meeting to review related district and school policies and standards and to discuss priorities, schedules, etc.</li> <li>Finalize the observation schedule.</li> <li>Ensure that all new teachers receive initial training on the practice instrument.</li> <li>Discuss yearly refresher training for observers.</li> <li>Identify all new teachers and ensure they receive a comprehensive orientation.</li> <li>Ensure each novice provisional teacher has a 1-1 mentor.</li> </ul>
October	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>Ensure all school staff members have received information and training on all components of the district evaluation rubric.</li> <li>Ensure all observers are appropriately qualified and trained.</li> <li>Identify any obstacles in the process of setting SGOs prior to October 31 deadline.</li> <li>Survey new teachers about their support needs.</li> <li>Ensure any necessary annual modifications to the PDPs are updated prior to October 31 deadline.</li> </ul>
November – December	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>Review the first round of teacher observation data and identify related PD needs. Share findings of this review with the DEAC.</li> <li>Discuss “lessons learned” from first round of co-observations.</li> </ul>
January	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>Review the progress of observations.</li> <li>Review the quality of feedback provided to teachers.</li> <li>Get feedback from new teachers, review how they are doing and suggest approaches for further assistance.</li> </ul>
February- March	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>Review the implementation of Corrective Action Plans (CAPs); ensure CAP teachers receive mid-year evaluation:               <ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>Before February 15 (if CAP in place before October 31, or</li> <li>Before summative conference (if CAP in place after October 31).</li> </ul> </li> <li>Identify any obstacles in the process of adjusting any SGOs as appropriate prior to February 15 deadline.</li> <li>Conduct <a href="#">calibration activities</a> with observers such as video review of lessons.</li> <li>Reflect on the progress and quality of the second round of co-observations.</li> </ul>
April	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>Review the second round of teacher observation data and identify related PD needs.</li> <li>Review challenges in the teacher observation process and report those findings to the DEAC.</li> <li>Develop school professional development plan for the upcoming year; ensure plans integrate with mentoring requirements and refresher trainings.</li> </ul>
May-June	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>Review assessments upon which SGOs were based and analyze SGO results.</li> <li>Solicit educator feedback about PD, mentoring, and evaluation practices.</li> <li>Celebrate the year’s successes.</li> </ul>
July	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>Begin designing group professional learning activities outlined in the school PDP based on student learning and observation data.</li> </ul>
Ongoing	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>Identify PD opportunities based on available data, including feedback from teachers and administrators.</li> <li>Communicate regularly about the work of the DEAC, SCIP, and other important district and school initiatives.</li> </ul>



## Appendix B: Resources

In order to understand critical elements of teacher evaluation, mentoring, and professional development, members of the SciP should be familiar with the following key resources provided by the state. The Department recommends SciP members discuss these sources together to share any questions or action steps that result from reading the materials. For example, a SciP might determine that all teachers should receive direct links to one or more resources, or that a particular document should be read and discussed at a faculty or PLC meeting. Any questions resulting from the materials should be compiled, discussed with district leaders, and shared with the Department, if necessary.

### Resources on Professional Development

- [New Jersey's Standards for Professional Learning](#): The framework for designing effective professional learning systems.
- [Revised requirements for teacher professional development set forth in regulations adopted in June 2013](#).
- Current school and district professional development plans (request from school/district leadership)
- [Professional Development Website](#)
- Collaborative Professional Learning in School and Beyond: A Toolkit for New Jersey Educators <http://www.nj.gov/education/profdev/resources/>
- [www.learningforward.org](http://www.learningforward.org) Source of many resources on high-quality PD and the Standards for Professional Learning.

### Resources on Mentoring

- [New Jersey's Professional Standards for Teachers](#): These standards outline the knowledge, performances, and dispositions that define exemplary teaching practice.
- Description of the Provisional Teacher Program (link) <http://www.nj.gov/education/educators/license/provprogram.htm#ptp>
- District mentoring plan (request from district office)
- [Overview of New Mentoring Regulations](#)
- [Optional Mentoring Log Template](#)
- [Mentoring for Quality Induction Toolkit](#)
- New Teacher Center: Review of State Policies on Teacher Induction (includes NJ) (Link) <http://www.newteachercenter.org/products-and-resources/policy-reports/review-state-policies-teacher-induction>

### Resources on Teacher Evaluation

- [Teacher Evaluation Overview](#): A 2-page guide to the components of teacher evaluation under AchieveNJ
- [Teacher Practice Overview](#): A 2-page guide to observation and training requirements for State-approved teacher practice instruments
- [Evaluation of Special Education Teachers](#): A 4-page guide with more information about issues related to teachers of special education students
- [Evaluation of Teachers of English Language Learners](#): A 3-page guide with suggestions for evaluating those who teach English Language Learners
- [Evaluation of Teachers with Extended Absences](#): A 3-page document providing guidance on evaluating teachers in various leave or absence situations
- [Teacher Evaluation Scoring Guide](#): A 24-slide presentation explaining how the various components of teacher evaluation are scored, then weighted and combined to calculate the summative evaluation rating

- [Implementing Teacher Evaluation Web Page](#): A section of the AchieveNJ website including compiled guidance materials and resources
- [Training and Implementation Overview](#): A 2-page guide to training and implementation requirements for evaluation components
- [SGO Overview](#): A 2-page guide to understanding SGOs
- [SGO Quick Start Guide](#): A 2-page summary of the longer [SGO Guidebook](#) with the top steps for setting quality SGOs
- [SGP Overview](#) (Word): A 2-page guide to understanding Student Growth Percentiles (SGPs)
- [SGP Overview](#) (Presentation): A 25-slide presentation explaining SGPs
- [SGP Overview Video](#): A video explanation of how SGPs are calculated
- [mSGP User Guide](#): An 8-page overview of how median SGP scores (mSGPs) are assigned to teachers and used in evaluations, starting with a practice exercise using 2012-13 data (not applied to evaluations)
- [SciP Corner](http://www.nj.gov/education/AchieveNJ/scip/): (<http://www.nj.gov/education/AchieveNJ/scip/>): Guidance, resources, etc. for SciPs based on educator feedback
- [DEAC Corner](http://www.nj.gov/education/AchieveNJ/deac/) (<http://www.nj.gov/education/AchieveNJ/deac/>): Guidance, suggestions, sample meeting agendas, etc. for DEACs based on educator feedback