Using Improvement Cycles to Promote Equitable Instructional Practices: Oklahoma Excel

The many roles educators take on during the school day can make it difficult for them to identify and implement evidence-based practices that work in their classroom or school. Continuous improvement, particularly through rapid research cycles, is one way of choosing, testing, and adjusting practices in “real time.” Oklahoma Excel is a yearlong professional development program designed to support equitable and innovative teaching and learning. Oklahoma Excel enables districts to use Title II, Part A, and Title IV, Part A funds to try, test, and refine research-based instructional practices using Plan-Do-Study-Act (PDSA) cycles.

PLAN-DO-STUDY-ACT

PDSA is a process used in improvement research to innovate, test, review, and revise improvement strategies. PDSA cycles originally were developed for industry and health care to test and pilot innovations and interventions. Educators and researchers apply PDSA cycles as part of continuous improvement using four principles and three guiding questions.

Understand the current challenge

Identify specific areas for improvement

Determine what changes to implement

Evaluate how the changes led to improvement

What specifically are we trying to accomplish?
What change might we introduce and why?
How will we know a change is actually an improvement?
Oklahoma Excel is the central pillar of the Oklahoma State Department of Education (OSDE) Champions of Excellence initiative to provide students with a well-rounded education in safe and healthy schools. Through Oklahoma Excel, participants engage in networked improvement communities (NICs) and PDSA cycles to implement and refine practices. Teachers, leaders, and schools receive tailored professional learning, coaching, resources, and tools through this program to make advancements using PDSA cycles towards safe and healthy schools, and in core subject areas outlined in OSDE’s Programs of Excellence rubrics.

The Programs of Excellence rubrics include the following focal areas:

- Science
- English language arts
- Mathematics
- Social studies
- World languages
- Safe and healthy schools
- Computer science
- Fine arts

Through the Southwest Networked Improvement Communities Research Partnership (SWNIC), Regional Educational Laboratory (REL) Southwest provides OSDE staff with in-depth coaching and consultation to establish, pilot, and sustain Oklahoma Excel.

Annual Process for Oklahoma Excel District/School Teams

(Improvement Fellow and 3–5 teachers)

**FALL**

- Join and engage in a content-area networked improvement community
- Explore equitable instructional practices that show potential
- Try, test, and refine the practices through PDSA cycles
- Measure the effectiveness of the practices in their own schools
- Learn and grow together with other participating districts

**SPRING**
By mid-2020, REL Southwest and OSDE will have achieved the following together:

- **3 cohorts of NICs** conducting multiple PDSA cycles to test instructional practices
- **20 district teams** testing change ideas related to the following:
  - Safe and healthy schools (4 teams)
  - Science (10 teams)
  - English language arts (7 teams)
  - Mathematics (6 teams)
  - Social studies (3 teams)
- **29 Improvement Fellows** — teachers or instructional leaders who receive improvement science training, serve as point persons for their NIC teams, and provide leadership, improvement science expertise, and project management
- **137 teachers** collaborating in NICs who pursue innovative, ambitious, and equitable instruction and teach 2,969 students in total

LEARN MORE

Explore how Oklahoma Excel and the Champions of Excellence initiative can benefit your district:

- **Oklahoma Excel**: [https://sde.ok.gov/oklahoma-excel](https://sde.ok.gov/oklahoma-excel)
- **Champions of Excellence**: [https://sde.ok.gov/championexcellence](https://sde.ok.gov/championexcellence)
REFERENCES


4. Langley et al., 2019
