Ed.D. Program and Dissertation Handbook

Professional Education Doctorate in School Improvement

2025-2026 Edition

The University of Texas at Tyler
College of Education & Psychology
School of Education (BEP 247)
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Ed.D. in School Improvement
Program Established in 2020
Doctoral Program Handbook
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UT Tyler COLLEGE OF EDUCATION & PSYCHOLOGY

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Welcome!

Congratulations on your acceptance into the School Improvement doctoral program in in the College of Education and Psychology at the University of Texas at Tyler. The Ed.D. in School Improvement degree is designed with a Texas *public school* emphasis to meet the demands of education today, specifically in the areas of school improvement and school turnaround.

Graduates of the doctoral program often pursue leadership positions in public school districts, higher education, state or federal agencies, or the private sector. The Ed.D. degree is an online doctoral program delivered in a seminar or professional learning community format, providing flexibility for working students as well as personal interaction with UT Tyler faculty. Each Summer there is a 1-week mandatory seminar.

Applicants for the School Improvement doctoral program may have completed a master's degree in Education Leadership, Curriculum and Instruction, or other related degrees. However, we recognize that those with master's degrees from other disciplines that support public school or higher education settings help us create cohorts of students that reflect those involved in the school improvement process.

Prerequisites for success include a demonstration of strong academic attainment, polished technical writing skills, potential scholarship ability, leadership abilities, and commitment to data-driven education.

If you have any questions about this program, you can contact the Office of Graduate Studies or the Doctoral Program Co-Coordinators, Dr. Michael Odell (modell@uttyler.edu) or Dr. Yanira Oliveras (yoliveras@uttyler.edu).

Once again, congratulations on your acceptance into the School Improvement doctoral program at the University of Texas at Tyler.

Note: This handbook is subject to change. Updates will be available on the College of Education and Psychology Website and the EdD in School Improvement Information Canvas course. This is not a catalog and all current policies and procedures are found in the University Catalog. Students are responsible for knowing and acting in accordance and compliance with UT Tyler's Policies & Procedures.

Vision

The mission of the CEP is to prepare competent and passionate professionals in the fields of education, psychology, and counseling; to advance knowledge and expertise; and to impact these fields locally, regionally, nationally, and internationally.

Mission

The CEP will be a global leader in responding to needs in the fields of education, psychology, and counseling, with a focus on the East Texas region, by creating innovative academic and scholarly pathways and partnerships.

School of Education

Vision

Become a leading Educator Preparation Program in East Texas and beyond.

Mission

Prepare the next generation of educators for the ever-increasing demands of a diverse, complex, and changing world by engaging students in high-impact teaching, research, and service opportunities shaped to advance the educational, economic, technological, and public interests of East Texas and beyond.

Core Values

As teachers, scholars, and community members, we champion the core values of respect, responsibility, teamwork, collaboration, and excellence.

- **Respect.** We value, support, promote and encourage diversity, equity, acceptance, and community.
- **Responsibility.** We take seriously our charge for making a difference in teaching, service, and research and promoting educational equity and access.
- **Teamwork.** We encourage and value interdisciplinary and collaborative endeavors, within and outside of our college, institution, state, and beyond.
- **Excellence.** We are committed to continuous improvement in our teaching, service and scholarship that promote excellence.

Goals

The goals of the School of Education, which are consistent with the College of Education and Psychology Vision 2025 and the University of Texas at Tyler's Strategic Plan, are designed to advance the school's mission and vision in dynamic and constructive ways.

DOCTOR OF EDUCATION IN SCHOOL IMPROVEMENT

The UT Tyler Ed.D. in School Improvement will provide Texas educators the option to complete an online doctoral program that is a unique opportunity for educators to develop a deep understanding of change theory, foundations of school improvement, and issues of diversity. The program will facilitate the transfer of theoretical constructs and understanding to practice.

Our primary method of delivery is in an online environment. Students will be required to attend an annual summer face-to-face seminar where they will have the opportunity to collaborate with their classmates and the Ed.D. faculty.

The goals of the Ed.D. in School Improvement are to:

- Produce the next generation of educators who understand the philosophical and historical perspectives of school reform, diversity, learning opportunities for all, and can address educational issues using a variety of strategies.
- Develop critical reasoning and a deep understanding of improvement science and change theories to address challenges in school improvement contexts. This will include the skills to provide transformative leadership to schools that are failing, at risk of failing or are seeking ways to continuously improve to meet academic, social, and emotional standards.
- Provide opportunities to develop doctoral students' ability to approach challenges in innovative data-driven ways, including the use of interdisciplinary teams, as well as expand their problem solving, creative design, communication, and collaboration skills.
- Conduct research of practice and responsiveness to improve teaching and learning experiences, counseling and support services, school leadership, educational organizations and structures, and all other educational disciplines.

SCHOOL IMPROVEMENT FACULTY

The faculty of the School Improvement Doctoral Program are professional educators who bring their public-school improvement experiences to the program. Our faculty have served as teachers, assistant principals, principals, coordinators, directors, assistant superintendents, and superintendents in various school districts and as school improvement consultants. Their field-based understandings combined with active research agendas make for the best possible learning opportunities as students seek to become educational leaders who will make a difference in schools, school districts, and local communities. A complete list of faculty can be found later in the handbook.

ED.D. IN SCHOOL IMPROVEMENT

Admission Requirements

To be admitted to the Ed.D. in School Improvement program, a prospective student must:

- Hold a master's degree in an education-related field from a regionally or nationally accredited institution.
- Have at least three years of experience in education (record of service)
- Write and submit an essay related to a school improvement problem of practice limited to 1,000 words.
- Submit a resume in .pdf or Word format.

Program Coordinators

Dr. Michael Odell

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For admission information, contact the School of Education Graduate Admissions Coordinator at SOEgraduate@uttyler.edu.

The Office of Graduate Admissions, STE 345
The University of Texas at Tyler
3900 University Blvd
Tyler Texas 75799

You may also email the graduate school ogs@uttyler.edu

Overview of Degree Requirements

All students must complete a total of 60 doctoral-level credits in the following component areas:

School Improvement Major - 30 hours
Research and Statistics - 15 hours
Dissertation in Practice - 12 hours
Summer Residency - 3 hours

A student may transfer a maximum of 12 semester hours of graduate credit in which a grade of "B" or better has been earned from approved institutions. **Transfer credit must be approved by the Ed.D. Program Directors**. Transfer credit cannot be approved unless an official transcript of all transfer work is on file in the Office of Graduate Studies. Transfer credit should be evaluated and approved prior to the completion of the degree plan.

COURSE DESCRIPTIONS

60 CREDIT HOURS

School Improvement Courses (30 hours)

EDSI 6311 – Data-Driven Planning for School Improvement

This course is focused on developing an understanding of educational improvement initiatives; exploring the application of knowledge to formulate objectives and implementation strategies to lead systemic school improvement efforts; and examine strategic plans that promote long-term improvement for educational systems at the district, school, and classroom levels.

EDSI 6312 – The Study and Application of Improvement Science

A course focused on the study and application of principles and practices of improvement science to enhance teaching practices, raise student performance, and reduce the achievement gaps.

EDSI 6313 – School Improvement and Accountability Models

This course is designed to examine Texas, national and international educational change models; analyze the sustainability and effectiveness of the models; and the survey the impact of these models on school improvement efforts. Additionally, the course explores current school accountability models, systems, and strategies at the national, state, and local levels, including the Texas and locally developed school accountability systems.

EDSI 6314 – Research-Based Pedagogies for School Improvement

This course examines the analysis and use of research-based pedagogies by critically reviewing previous and current learning theories and instructional practices that have proven to support school improvement.

EDSI 6320 – Leading Critical Conversations for School Improvement

This course employs an interdisciplinary approach to examine how educational leaders can determine, promote, support, and achieve successful, systematic school improvement through the use data and meaningful feedback, and the implementation of systems to monitor the teaching and student learning. Furthermore, the course explores the skills needed to engage in critical conversations and conflict resolution while enacting change and creating a culture of continuous improvement.

EDSI 6321 – Support Systems for Job-Embedded Professional Learning

This course focuses on the design, implementation and evaluation of effective professional learning and development programs to promote school improvement. The course will also explore the use of observation data to design teacher-centered professional development that applies research-based andragogy and the tenants of high qualify professional learning.

EDSI 6322 – Culturally Responsive Practices for School Improvement

This course is focused on strategies to meet the needs of evolving diversity of public-school settings and developing school cultures that promote high achievement. This includes awareness of self, cultural responsiveness, and sensitivity about cultures, concepts and methods in society, communities and in educational settings while exploring the challenges faced by educational leaders in an increasingly diverse society.

EDSI 6323 – Instructional Supervision for School Improvement

This course enables students to engage in an in-depth examination of the literature related to professional learning and coaching. From that exploration of the professional learning and coaching, students will develop models and metrics to assist their educational organization advance the effectiveness of coaching taking place and clearly communicate results from coaching to the educational organization leaders, the individuals being coached, as well as stakeholders in the educational organization. Special emphasis will be on the issues of academic achievement, equity, diversity, inclusion, and social and emotional needs in educational organizations.

EDSI 6330 – School Culture and Community Engagement for School Improvement

This course examines methods to establish a plan and systems to authentically engage the community in the school improvement process while establishing a school culture of continuous improvement. The community engagement plan will include but will not be limited to systems to enhance communication with parents and other stakeholders, and how to turn community supports into advocates.

EDSI 6331 – Educational Policy and School Improvement

A course focused on the development and analysis of education policy, and policy's influence on schools and school improvement efforts.

Educational Research Methods (15 hours)

EDRM 6350 – Program Evaluation in the Education Setting

A course designed to introduce program evaluations and mixed-methods research design. This includes mixed methods research methods and methodology focused on the design and implementation of research that combines qualitative and quantitative data collection and analysis within educational research contexts. This includes survey research as practiced in education. The course examines methods and procedures for conducting effective evaluation of educational programs.

EDRM 6351 – Design-Based Implementation Research

A course designed to introduce design-based implementation research as a method to design, sustain and evaluate programs in education. The course will focus on the use of the approach to ground systematic inquiry and build capacity to engage in continuous improvement while adhering to the four principles of design-based implementation research.

EDRM 6352 – Quantitative Research Methods in the Education Setting

This course focuses on the field of quantitative research and statistics. It focuses on the stages of quantitative research including the development of educational research questions, research designs, conceptual frameworks, methodological stances, data collection and analysis, statistics, and instrument design, and implementation in education settings. The course will focus on the interpretation and use of quantitative data with emphasis on the implications for school improvement, educational policy and research design.

EDRM 6353 – Qualitative Methods in the Education Setting

A course focused on the field of qualitative research and foundational philosophies of and approaches to qualitative research in educational settings. In this course, students explore the stages of qualitative research including the development of educational research questions, research designs, conceptual frameworks, methodological stances, data collection and analysis and instrument design and implementation in education settings.

EDRM 6354 – Learning Analytics

This course is an introduction to educational data mining and learning analytics. Learning analytics involves the application of statistical techniques to educational data for the purpose of predicting student behavior and learning. The course will cover the history and value of learning analytics. The course will also cover commonly used learning analytic techniques such as multiple regression, logistic regression, cluster analysis, and factor analysis.

School Improvement Summer Policy Residency (3 hours)

EDSI 6370 – School Improvement Policy Residency (Austin, TX)

The course will give students the opportunity to meet with school improvement policy makers, state leaders and other educational organization representatives to explore the issues and policy critical to quality, stability, change in teaching, curriculum, and school organization, toward the aim of fundamental reform for school improvement.

Dissertation/Dissertation in Practice (12 hours)[1]

- EDSI 6160 – Dissertation (2 hours)[2]
- EDSI 6161 – Dissertation (3 hours)[2]
- EDSI 6162 – Dissertation (1 hour)
- EDSI 6360 – Dissertation (6 hours)

[1] Once students complete the required 12 credit hours of dissertation or dissertation in practice, the student will be required to register for 1-credit per semester until the successful completion of the dissertation.

[2] The summer dissertation sessions will be face-to-face and will be scheduled during the required annual summer workshop. All other 1-credit dissertation courses will be online synchronous courses.

Students will be required to attend an annual five-day summer residency workshop annually. This includes the orientation prior to beginning the program. The workshops will be structured like a conference with a range of sessions depending on the students' cohorts. The focus of the workshops will be a combination of core skills to succeed in a doctoral program and motivational sessions. As students progress through their program of study, they will have the opportunity to attend sessions focused on the development of a research plan and research-based practices to succeed in writing and defending a dissertation.

Summer 0: Orientation Tyler, TX
Summer 1: Tyler, TX
Summer 2: Tyler, TX
Summer 3: Austin, TX

Note: The summer is a requirement. In the event any days are missed they will have to be made up and may result in delaying your graduation, even if coursework is complete.

Course Sequence

Year 1	
Fall	
EDRM 6352*	Quantitative Research Methods in the Education Setting
EDRM 6353*	Qualitative Methods in the Education Setting
Spring	
EDRM 6350*	Program Evaluation in the Education Setting
EDSI 6312*	The Study and Application of Improvement Science
EDSI 6160	Dissertation
Summer	
EDRM 6351*	Design-Based Implementation Research
EDSI 6313	School Improvement & Accountability Models
EDSI 6160	Dissertation
Year 2	
Fall	
EDSI 6311	Data-Driven Planning for School Improvement
EDSI 6314	Research-Based Pedagogies for School Improvement
EDSI 6161	Dissertation
Spring	
EDRM 6354*	Design-Based Implementation Research II
EDSI 6321	Support Systems for Job-Embedded Professional Learning
EDSI 6161	Dissertation
Summer	
EDSI 6323	Instructional Supervision for School Improvement
EDSI 6322	Culturally Responsive Practices for School Improvement
EDSI 6161	Dissertation
Year 3	
Fall	
EDSI 6320	Leading Critical Conversations for School Improvement
EDSI 6330	School Culture & Community Engagement for School Improvement
EDSI 6162	Dissertation
Spring	
EDSI 6331	Educational Policy and School Improvement
EDSI 6360	Dissertation
Summer	
EDSI 6370	School Improvement Policy Residency (face to face) Austin, TX
EDSI 6360	Dissertation[3]

*If you earn a C in any foundational course (indicated with an asterisk above), you must retake and pass the course before proceeding to the next semester.

[3] Students who complete 9 hours of dissertation and will be required to register for 1-credit per semester (EDSI 6162) until the successful completion of the dissertation.

MILESTONES AGREEMENT FORM

This form is provided for the purpose of informing students about the academic milestones that they will be expected to reach to earn their EdD degree as well as when they are expected to complete these milestones. Students are expected to reach each milestone within the specified time period in order to make satisfactory progress through the program. Students who are not making satisfactory progress may lose funding, be placed on academic probation, or be dismissed from the program.

Academic Advising

Upon entering the EdD in School Improvement program, all students will be assigned an initial advisor. The initial advisor is one of the two program directors. During the first year in the program, an advisor is assigned by the program director based on the students anticipated program of research and faculty expertise. The advisors will be members of the program department.

Academic advising includes the following elements that are designed to ensure that students remain in good academic standing and make satisfactory progress through the program. Advisors are responsible for the following:

- Ensuring that reviews between student and advisor occur every semester. The results of this review will be included in the program's annual doctoral progress report.
- Ensure the student is following the degree plan and registering for courses in the correct order.
- Reviewing the student's Degree Plan to determine if the student is making progress consistent with the expectations of the program and reaching milestones according to the timeline provided on this form; working with the Doctoral Studies Committee and student to determine if modifications are necessary.
- Clarifying the timetable for completing any remaining course requirements, examinations, and other requirements
- Providing the student with assistance in understanding the requirements for successful completion of dissertation.
- Providing the student with assistance in assembling a dissertation committee.
- Providing the student with experiences and information that will optimize the student's career opportunities and success.

REQUIREMENTS FOR ALL STUDENTS IN THE EDD IN SCHOOL IMPROVEMENT PROGRAM MILESTONE	EXPECTED TIME OF ACHIEVEMENT
Review of student's progress with advisor	At least every summer but more frequently if needed
Participate in the Annual Summer Workshops	Every summer
Successful completion of six 1-credit dissertation courses	Every semester starting in the second semester of the program.
IRB approval	By the end of the first year in the program
Coursework successfully completed	Within three years of beginning program
Dissertation Committee appointed and approved by Graduate School	By the beginning of the second year in the program
Problem of Practice Approval by Chair and Committee (Summer Year 1/Fall Year 2)	Following successful completion of research and dissertation courses (within three years of beginning program)
Student admitted to doctoral candidacy	Following successful completion of the oral defense (within four years of beginning program)
Dissertation completed, successfully defended, and approved by Committee	Within two years of dissertation POP approval
Student completes and files all paperwork required for graduation	Semester prior to graduation
Dissertation accepted by Graduate School	Within three months of successful final defense
Exit interview completed and submitted to Survey of Earned Doctorates (SED)	Prior to graduation

ED.D. PROGRAM COMPLETION CHECKLIST

COMPLETION DATE

Many of the events a doctoral student encounters are listed below in approximate chronological order. The time frame is a helpful guide; it is the student's responsibility to know and follow university policies regarding completion of doctoral studies. This checklist is designed for you to maintain a record of the completion of each step.

	Milestone
	Initial Program Requirements
___	File Initial Degree Plan with department immediately upon admission. Obtain all necessary signatures.
___	Participate in Summer Orientation/EdD Workshop prior to the first fall semester.
___	Complete Milestones Agreement Form with your advisor no later than the last class day of the first semester.
___	Maintain active student status by registering every fall, spring, and summer semester.
	Advising and Committee
___	A major advisor will be assigned to assist with your degree plan and program requirements. Depending on research interests, another School Improvement core faculty member may be assigned as dissertation chair.
___	Appointment of Dissertation Chair(s). The department facilitates a matching process based on research topic and methodology.
___	Form your dissertation committee in consultation with your advisor and dissertation chair, and have it approved by the program Graduate Studies Committee and Graduate School.
	Coursework Requirements
___	Complete all required coursework in the cohort sequence.
___	Meet Research Course Requirements (five research classes required for candidacy eligibility).
___	Meet Dissertation Course Requirements (six 1-credit hour dissertation courses required for candidacy eligibility).
___	Participate in Annual EdD Summer Workshops, including at least one summer trip to Austin.
	Candidacy and Problem of Practice Approval
___	Download and use the checklist from the Candidacy and Dissertation Manual.
___	Submit Chapters 1 and 2 to your dissertation chair for approval to proceed with topic and IRB submission approval.
___	Apply for Advancement to Candidacy.

Milestone

___ Obtain Admission to Candidacy Status (after completion of core courses, research courses, and candidacy approval; advisor files Notification of Admission to Candidacy form).

Dissertation and Defense

___ Enroll in required dissertation hours (EDSI 6360) with your dissertation chair.

___ Prepare and schedule your Dissertation Oral Defense after gaining approval from your major advisor. Program co-coordinators will provide information at the appropriate time.

___ Successfully complete the Dissertation Oral Defense.

Graduation

___ Submit all required documentation to the Graduate School for completion and graduation.

I have read this form and have had the opportunity to discuss the information contained in it with my advisor. I understand the academic milestones that I am expected to reach in order to successfully complete the EdD in School Improvement program, as well as the expected timeline for completing these milestones.

Student Name (print) Student's Signature Date

Advisor's Signature Date

PROGRAM REQUIREMENTS & POLICIES

Time Limitation

The Ed.D. in School Improvement is a cohort program and students are expected to progress through the program as part of their assigned cohort. The program allows students complete rigorous doctoral study while maintaining full-time employment as a professional. Candidates may complete the entire program in as few as 3 years. All degree requirements must be completed within ten calendar years from the date of admission to the doctoral program. No coursework that is over ten years old at the time the doctoral degree is conferred can be used toward the doctoral degree.

Time Extension

When extenuating circumstances warrant, the Dean of The Graduate School may grant an extension for one year. The student must submit a written request to the dissertation advisor and obtain approval from both the major advisor/dissertation chair and the program's graduate director, who forwards the request to the Dean of The Graduate School. Final approval of the request rests with the Dean of The Graduate School.

Transfer Credit

With advisor recommendation and program coordinator approval, a student may transfer a maximum of 12 semester credit hours from another regionally accredited institution of higher education toward the doctoral degree. Hours transferred into an Ed.D. program should represent credit earned after the award of the master's degree. Only credit with a grade of "B" of better may be transferred. Credit earned more than six calendar years before admission to the program will not be accepted for transfer. Approved courses will be posted on the degree plan. Under no circumstances may a student transfer more than 12 hours toward the doctoral degree.

Course Related Travel

UT Tyler is committed to your success in completion of your doctorate. Each summer you will be required to attend a 1-week seminar. The seminar will have a different focus each summer. Doctoral candidates are responsible for all travel costs. The summer locations will include Tyler, Austin, and perhaps Washington D.C. In addition to focusing on the Dissertation of Practice, students will network with education policy makers at all levels.

COURSEWORK EXPECTATIONS

Time Commitment

Time Commitment Guidelines are provided to assist candidates in planning for successful completion of courses. Because the program is online the following time guideline should be taken into consideration.

In a traditional face-to-face setting, a 3-credit course requires 3 contact hours per week and there is the expectation of **2-3 hours of outside time per credit** in additional assignments. The course load for the Ed.D. in School Improvement is 6-7 credits per semester, which translates to ***18-21 hours per week each semester***.

In the online environment, videos and discussions are the equivalent of "in-class" activities. Approximately 3 hours should be devoted to these activities each week in each course. Other activities, such as readings, homework assignments, projects, and papers are considered "outside class" activities. Up to 6 hours each week should be devoted to these types of activities.

In semesters where students are enrolled in dissertation credits, each credit is equal to 3 hours of work per week.

Quality Class Discussions

Although the instructor may set a deadline for a discussion this is not an indication that students should post at the last minute. Canvas discussions are part of class-time and students should dedicate 2-3 hours a week in a discussion. This means, posting early in the week and throughout the week until the instructor closes the discussion.

Participation Analytics

Canvas provides instructors analytics of participation.

Writing Expectations

Writing is to be of professional quality. There should be no grammar errors. Students may want to craft answers in an electronic document, i.e. in Word, to assure no errors and then paste into Canvas. Students are expected to refer to the research literature when writing papers and participating in discussions. Students are expected to cite research and format papers using APA 7 Guidelines.

Minimal Progress

The academic progress requirements for all doctoral students include a minimum grade point average (GPA) of 3.0, and timely completion of department and program requirements (e.g., courses, candidacy, dissertation requirements). In addition, students earn “CR” (credit)

indicating satisfactory progress for 12 semester credit hours (SCH) of dissertation work. Receipt of two consecutive “NC” (no credit)/no progress is considered a failure to meet minimum academic progress. Earning a C in one course is also considered failure to meet minimum academic progress. Doctoral students may retake the course in which they earn a grade of C, D or F but they are not eligible for grade replacement. In cases where a student repeats a course, the student must note the course as repeated “Not for Grade Replacement” on a Course Repeat / Grade Replacement Enrollment Form at the time of enrollment. For a course repeat using the “Not for Grade Replacement” option, both the original and last grade earned in the course will be used to calculate the overall grade point average.

IF THE ADVISOR OR DISSERTATION CHAIR DETERMINES THE STUDENT HAS MADE INADEQUATE IN THE DISSERTATION, THE STUDENT WILL NOT BE PERMITTED TO MOVE FORWARD UNTIL THE EXPECTATIONS ARE MET.

Once the student has advanced to candidacy, the student must complete a minimum of an additional 6 hours of doctoral dissertation credit to fulfill the requirements of the degree. Failure to meet the minimum academic progress milestones will result in a review of the student’s progress to date by a committee to include program coordinator, program faculty, college dean and, if appropriate, dissertation committee. A letter will be sent to the student outlining the specific requirements to be met and the timeline within which to satisfy them. Actions may occur, including the placement of an enrollment hold on the student’s account until specific conditions outlined in the letter are satisfied. The committee could also recommend termination of the student from doctoral degree program. Students who earn 2 Cs will be permanently dismissed from the program.

Incomplete Policy ("I" Grade)

If a student, because of extenuating circumstances, is unable to complete all the requirements for a course by the end of the semester, then the instructor may recommend an Incomplete (I) for the course. The "I" may be assigned in lieu of a grade only when all of the following conditions are met:

a. the student has been making satisfactory progress in the course;
b. the student is unable to complete all course work or final exam due to unusual circumstances that are beyond personal control and are acceptable to the instructor; and
c. the student presents these reasons prior to the time that the final grade roster is due. The semester credit hours for an Incomplete will not be used to calculate the grade point average for a student.

The student and the instructor must submit an Incomplete Form detailing the work required and the time by which the work must be completed to their respective department chair or college dean for approval. The time limit established must not exceed one year. Should the student fail to complete all of the work for the course within the time limit, then the instructor may assign zeros to the unfinished work, compute the course average for the student, and assign the appropriate grade. If a grade has not

been assigned within one year, then the Incomplete will be changed to an F, or to NC if the course was originally taken under the CR/NC grading basis.

Candidacy

For a student to advance to candidacy, he or she must:

(1) Earn a minimum of a B in all courses. If a student earns two Cs, or two NCs, he/she will be dismissed from the program.

(2) Complete all coursework with a minimum GPA of 3.0.

(3) Prepare a dossier that includes:

a. A school improvement manuscript submitted to a practitioner-oriented journal.
b. Evidence of conference presentation on a school improvement concept or issue at a state or national conference.
c. Review of literature for approved dissertation concept or the introduction to the dissertation in practice.

Institutional Review Board (IRB) Approval

Federal regulations and University policy require that all investigations using animal or human beings as subjects of research be reviewed and approved by the appropriately constituted committees before such investigations may begin. Data based on the use of animals or human beings as subjects cannot be collected for any dissertation without prior review and approval in accordance with university procedures.

Leave of Absence

A student may request a Leave of Absence for academic and/or non-academic reasons. Examples of non-academic reasons include, but are not limited to: childbearing or adoption; personal illness; critical care of a family member; financial or job-related interruption; and military service. The Leave of Absence is approved for a specific time period and allows the student to return to the college without formally reapplying for admission to the College.

A condition of the Leave of Absence is that the student must complete their course of study in 5 years of less from the original date of matriculation into the program, excluding on an approved leave of absence. Failure to successfully complete conditions listed within the Leave of Absence within the agreed upon timeframe will result in the student being placed on Academic Dismissal from the Ed.D. Students requesting a Leave of Absence who are failing one or more course(s) need to obtain approval for the leave. Students who request a leave of absence after the last day to withdraw from a course, will receive a “W” on their transcript unless a retroactive withdrawal has been approved by the appropriate university committee.

Inactive Status

A student not yet admitted to candidacy who has not enrolled for three consecutive semesters and who has not been granted an extension or a leave of absence will be placed in inactive status.

In order to resume graduate studies, the student must complete a new graduate school application at uttyler.edu/graduate and meet all admission requirements in force at the time of the new application. Readmission under these circumstances is not guaranteed. If readmitted, the student will be subject to all program requirements in force at the time the student is readmitted.

Graduation

Once the student has advanced to candidacy, the student must complete a minimum of an additional 6 hours of doctoral dissertation credit to fulfill the requirements of the degree. Upon completing the 12 required hours of dissertation credits, the student must take a minimum of one doctoral dissertation credit each semester while he/she is engaged in the research and writing of the dissertation or dissertation in practice. The topic dissertation for Ed.D. in School Improvement must be grounded in practice related to a school improvement issue or concept. Students are not confined to a specific type of research or research methodology to study their selected problem of practice related to school improvement. To graduate, the student must complete and successfully defend his or her Ed.D. dissertation or dissertation in practice.

Filing for Graduation

As specified in the University Catalog, the student must file for graduation in the Registrar's Office by the deadline indicated in the academic calendar for that semester. A student is entitled to graduate under the degree provisions of the catalog in effect at the time of admission into the doctoral program or a subsequent year, provided that in all cases the student fulfills the requirements of a catalog within ten years of currency.

Commencement

The degree is conferred at the commencement following the fulfillment of all requirements. The candidate is expected to be present at the ceremony. Summer graduates participate in the following Fall commencement ceremony and are automatically included in the program. Early participation in the preceding Spring ceremony is not permitted. Commencement dates and information are available at https://www.uttyler.edu/commencement/.

RESOURCES FOR SUCCESS

Co-Coordinators

- Provide general information regarding the department and the doctoral program to the student as needed, and
- Assist with the student's degree plan.
- Assign a faculty member to serve as the student's Committee Chair
- Assign appropriate committee members base upon expertise
- Support student and core faculty during the dissertation process to ensure all university timelines and forms are submitted as required by the Office of Graduate Studies.

Dissertation Committee Chair and/or Co-Chairs

By the end of first semester of the program, students will be assigned a committee chair or co-chairs. This process includes matching faculty with research expertise to assist the student in the completion of their dissertation of practice. In addition, committee members will be assigned based on enhancing expertise to match research needs.

Dissertation Committee

The committee is composed of three to four faculty members, one of whom is a School Improvement core-faculty member. The remaining member(s) will be from the education department and in some instances a member from outside the department. More detailed information about dissertation committees and required forms can be found on the UT Tyler Thesis and Dissertation Center's website.

Office of Graduate Studies

The Office of Graduate Studies and Research works closely with program faculty and the dean in providing a student-focused program. You may contact this office with any questions specific to the dissertation process. For information and forms, please go to the following web address:
https://www.uttyler.edu/graduate/forms/

Faculty Office Hours

These are times when students can meet with your faculty to ask questions about the content, better understand the discipline, make career connections and more. Make use of office hours. Doctoral faculty are available to students by appointment.

Writing Center

The Writing Center provides all students a place to work on their writing projects and skills. There are tutoring options as well as workshops available to support students in their academic writing.

Robert R. Muntz Library Staff

UT Tyler has an incredible staff of librarians ready to assist students. **Vandy Dubre** serves as the Education librarian; she available to support doctoral students. Students can schedule appointments for research consultations. In addition, the Robert R. Muntz library's Head of University Archives and Special Collections can assist students with scholarly communications, primary sources, and archive materials.

Canvas 101

This Canvas course provides students with a wealth of information – including how to navigate in Canvas, use ProctorU (and even take a practice test), tips for being a successful online and hybrid learner, how to use Zoom, and more!

UT Tyler Testing Center

The Testing Center provides securing testing opportunities to meet the needs of students and the community in an environment conducive to student and academic success.

Student Accessibility and Resource (SAR) Office

The SAR Office works to provide students equal access to all educational, social, and co-curriculum programs through the coordination of services and reasonable accommodations, consultation, and advocacy.

Student Counseling Center

The Student Counseling Center supports students in developing balance, resiliency, and overall well-being both academically and personally. They have in person and virtual counseling options. In addition, the Student Counseling Center offers TAO, a self-help, completely private online library of behavioral health resources. Sign into the TAO website using your UT Tyler credentials.

UNIVERSITY POLICIES

UT Tyler Honor Code

Every member of the UT Tyler community joins together to embrace: Honor and integrity that will not allow me to lie, cheat, or steal, nor to accept the actions of those who do.

Students Rights and Responsibilities

To know and understand the policies that affect your rights and responsibilities as a student at UT Tyler, please follow this link: https://www.uttyler.edu/offices/student-affairs/

Campus Carry

We respect the right and privacy of students 21 and over who are duly licensed to carry concealed weapons in this class. License holders are expected to behave responsibly and keep a handgun secure and concealed. More information is available at http://www.uttyler.edu/about/campus-carry/index.php

UT Tyler a Tobacco-Free University

All forms of tobacco will not be permitted on the UT Tyler main campus, branch campuses, and any property owned by UT Tyler. This applies to all members of the University community, including students, faculty, staff, University affiliates, contractors, and visitors. Forms of tobacco not permitted include cigarettes, cigars, pipes, water pipes (hookah), bidis, kreteks, electronic cigarettes, smokeless tobacco, snuff, chewing tobacco, and all other tobacco products. There are several cessation programs available to students looking to quit smoking, including counseling, quitlines, and group support. For more information on cessation programs please visit https://www.uttyler.edu/offices/human-resources/wellness/tobacco-cessation/students/

Census Date Policies

The Census Date is the deadline for many forms and enrollment actions of which students need to be aware. These include:

- Transient Forms
- Requests to withhold directory information
- Approvals for taking courses as Audit
- Pass/Fail or Credit/No Credit.
- Receiving 100% refunds for partial withdrawals (There is no refund for these after the Census Date).
- Schedule adjustments (section changes, adding a new class, dropping without a “W” grade)
- Being reinstated or re-enrolled in classes after being dropped for non-payment
- Completing the process for tuition exemptions or waivers through Financial Aid State-Mandated Course Drop Policy

Disability/Accessibility Services

In accordance with Section 504 of the Rehabilitation Act, Americans with Disabilities Act (ADA) and the ADA Amendments Act (ADAAA) the University of Texas at Tyler offers accommodations to students with learning, physical and/or psychological disabilities. If you have a disability, including a non-visible diagnosis such as a learning disorder, chronic illness, TBI, PTSD, ADHD, or you have a history of modifications or accommodations in a previous educational environment, you are encouraged to visit https://hood.accessiblelearning.com/UTTyler and fill out the New Student application. The Student Accessibility and Resources (SAR) office will contact you when your application has been submitted and an appointment with Cynthia Lowery, Assistant Director of Student Services/ADA Coordinator. For more information, including filling out an application for services, please visit the SAR webpage at https://www.uttyler.edu/offices/academic-affairs/disability-services/request/ the SAR office located in the University Center, # 3150 or call 903.566.7079.

Student Absence due to Religious Observance

Students who anticipate being absent from class due to a religious observance are requested to inform the instructor of such absences by the second-class meeting of the semester.

Student Absence for University-Sponsored Events and Activities

If you intend to be absent for a university-sponsored event or activity, you (or the event sponsor) must notify the instructor at least two weeks prior to the date of the planned absence. At that time the instructor will set a date and time when make-up assignments will be completed.

Social Security and FERPA Statement

It is the policy of The University of Texas at Tyler to protect the confidential nature of social security numbers. The University has changed its computer programming so that all students have an identification number. The electronic transmission of grades (e.g., via e-mail) risks violation of the Family Educational Rights and Privacy Act; grades will not be transmitted electronically.

Emergency Exits and Evacuation

Everyone is required to exit the building when a fire alarm goes off. Follow your instructor's directions regarding the appropriate exit. If you require assistance during an evacuation, inform your instructor in the first week of class. Do not re-enter the building unless given permission by University Police, Fire department, or Fire Prevention Services.

Student Standards of Academic Conduct

Disciplinary proceedings may be initiated against any student who engages in scholastic dishonesty, including, but not limited to, cheating, plagiarism, collusion, the submission for credit of any work or materials that are attributable in whole or in part to another person, taking an examination for another person, any act designed to give unfair advantage to a student or the attempt to commit such acts.

"**Cheating**" includes, but is not limited to:

- copying from another student's test paper;
- using, during a test, materials not authorized by the person giving the test;
- failure to comply with instructions given by the person administering the test;
- possession during a test of materials which are not authorized by the person giving the test, such as class notes or specifically designed "crib notes".
- The presence of textbooks constitutes a violation if they have been specifically prohibited by the person administering the test;
- using, buying, stealing, transporting, or soliciting in whole or part the contents of an unadministered test, test key, homework solution, or computer program;
- collaborating with or seeking aid from another student during a test or other assignment without authority;
- discussing the contents of an examination with another student who will take the examination;
- divulging the contents of an examination, for the purpose of preserving questions for use by another, when the instructors has designated that the examination is not to be removed from the examination room or not to be returned or to be kept by the student;
- substituting for another person, or permitting another person to substitute for oneself to take a course, a test, or any course-related assignment;
- paying or offering money or other valuable thing to, or coercing another person to obtain an unadministered test, test key, homework solution, or computer program or information about an unadministered test, test key, home solution or computer program;
- falsifying research data, laboratory reports, and/or other academic work offered for credit;
- taking, keeping, misplacing, or damaging the property of The University of Texas at Tyler, or of another, if the student knows or reasonably should know that an unfair academic advantage would be gained by such conduct; and
- misrepresenting facts, including providing false grades or resumes, for the purpose of obtaining an academic or financial benefit or injuring another student academically or financially.

"**Plagiarism**" includes, but is not limited to, the appropriation, buying, receiving as a gift, or obtaining by any means another's work and the submission of it as one's own academic work offered for credit. For information about "**self-plagiarism**", visit https://apastyle.apa.org/instructional-aids/avoiding-plagiarism.pdf

"**Collusion**" includes, but is not limited to, the unauthorized collaboration with another person in preparing academic assignments offered for credit or collaboration with another person to commit a violation of any section of the rules on scholastic dishonesty.

All written work that is submitted will be subject to review by plagiarism software.

Part 2: Dissertation Handbook

Purpose of the Dissertation Handbook

The purpose of this handbook is twofold:

1. To clearly outline the steps required for the development and successful completion of the **Dissertation in Practice (DiP)**, and
2. To guide you through the academic and procedural expectations of the dissertation process within the **EdD in School Improvement** program.

You are responsible for preparing your dissertation in accordance with the expectations detailed in this manual, the **latest edition of the Publication Manual of the American Psychological Association (APA Manual)**, and current university and program policies. Employing a professional editor during the final stages of the dissertation process is strongly recommended, although the final manuscript remains your responsibility.

While the dissertation is the culminating academic product in the EdD program, it is **only one component of your doctoral training**. You are responsible for meeting all program milestones and policies set forth by the **University of Texas at Tyler** and the **School of Education**. These include ethical research standards, adherence to Improvement Science principles, appropriate use of scholarly support tools (including AI), and contributions to the field through dissemination and publication.

Ultimately, you are accountable for the rigor, ethics, and scholarly integrity of your work—from problem identification to publication.

General Information

The **Dissertation in Practice (DiP)** combines professional and scholarly writing to address a complex, persistent **Problem of Practice (PoP)** situated within an educational organization. It integrates both existing research and practical, job-embedded knowledge to make a generative impact on real-world issues affecting PK–12 student outcomes. These issues may include both academic and non-academic factors such as instructional systems, teacher practices, organizational routines, and leadership structures.

Given the program's foundations, every dissertation should examine the PoP through the lens of **Improvement Science**, emphasizing variation, systems thinking, and iterative inquiry. Students may also draw upon additional conceptual frameworks—such

as leadership theory, motivation theory, or culturally responsive practices—when appropriate to their context and research goals.

A complex PoP is a **persistent challenge** that remains despite sustained efforts to address it. It is **high-leverage**, meaning that resolving it would yield substantial benefits for students, teachers, or systems. While the study may focus on a single school or district, it must be relevant to broader audiences and contribute actionable knowledge that can inform improvement efforts in similar settings.

The purpose of the DiP is to **advance both knowledge and practice**. Through careful study and system-level reflection, it surfaces insights into what works, for whom, and under what conditions. The DiP aims to identify and test **"next best practices"** to support better outcomes for students, families, educators, and educational systems.

For more information about the Dissertation in Practice and Problems of Practice, visit the Carnegie Project on the Education Doctorate (CPED) at www.cpedinitiative.org.

Improvement Science Framework

The signature framework guiding the Dissertation in Practice (DiP) is **Improvement Science**. This methodology supports practitioners in identifying complex Problems of Practice, analyzing their causes, testing change ideas, and contributing to the improvement of educational systems. The framework emphasizes **systems thinking**, **variation**, **user-centered design**, and **iterative cycles of inquiry** (e.g., PDSA).

Improvement Science offers a structure to guide each chapter of the dissertation:

1. **Chapter 1: What is the exact problem I am trying to address?**
   Framing the Problem of Practice (PoP) using system-level analysis.
2. **Chapter 2: What does the research and practice literature say about the PoP?**
   Synthesizing scholarly and practitioner literature relevant to the problem.
3. **Chapter 3: How can I operationally define and evaluate the problem?**
   Documenting how the problem manifests in the system through data and stakeholder input.
4. **Chapter 4: What change might I introduce to address the PoP and why?**
   What evidence will show whether the change results in improvement? Evaluating the implementation process and early outcomes.
5. **Chapter 5: What do these results mean for practice and future inquiry?**
   Reflecting on impact, systems learning, leadership development, and the next cycle of improvement.

Program Foundational Resources

Students are expected to engage with key texts that ground the program's approach to applied, practice-based research in educational settings:

- **Bryk, A. S., Gomez, L. M., Grunow, A., & LeMahieu, P. G. (2021).** *Learning to Improve: How America's Schools Can Get Better at Getting Better.* Harvard Education Press.
- **Perry, J. A., Zambo, D., & Crow, R. (2020).** *The Improvement Science Dissertation in Practice: A Guide for Faculty Committee Members and Their Students.* Myers Education Press.

These resources provide both the theoretical foundation and the practical tools necessary to design and conduct a rigorous Dissertation in Practice.

The Carnegie Project on the Education Doctorate (CPED) Initiative

The University of Texas at Tyler's **Doctor of Education (EdD) in School Improvement** is a proud member of the **Carnegie Project on the Education Doctorate (CPED)**, a national consortium of institutions committed to rethinking and redesigning the EdD as the degree of choice for scholarly practitioners in education. For more information visit www.cpedinitiative.org.

About CPED

The CPED Initiative was established to ensure that the EdD is a **rigorous, relevant, and practice-centered degree**, designed to prepare education leaders to:

- Apply inquiry and evidence to address real-world challenges,
- Generate new professional knowledge,
- And serve as responsible stewards of the education profession.

CPED's mission is to strengthen, improve, and promote the education doctorate by creating a community of institutions that share a common framework for transformative preparation of practitioner-scholars.

CPED Guiding Principles in the UT Tyler EdD

The CPED framework informs the design, pedagogy, and dissertation structure of the EdD in School Improvement. These core principles include:

1. **Scholar–Practitioner Model**
   The program blends scholarly research and practitioner knowledge. Students are prepared to engage in inquiry that addresses authentic problems in their educational settings.
2. **Signature Pedagogy: Improvement Science**
   Improvement Science provides a systems-based, data-driven, and iterative approach to addressing persistent Problems of Practice. This pedagogy supports continuous learning and context-responsive change.

3. **Problem of Practice (PoP)**
   Students identify high-leverage, real-world problems rooted in their professional context. These problems must have a measurable impact on student experiences, educator practices, or school systems.
4. **Dissertation in Practice (DiP)**
   The DiP is the culminating product that demonstrates the scholar–practitioner's ability to use research and Improvement Science to evaluate, design, and potentially implement change strategies that improve practice and generate actionable knowledge.
5. **Professional Ethics and Responsible Leadership**
   While not labeled under a specific equity framework, the program supports ethical inquiry, inclusive engagement with stakeholders, and a commitment to improving conditions for all learners.

Selecting a Problem of Practice

As an EdD candidate, you are expected to identify a **Problem of Practice (PoP)** that is grounded in your current educational context and informed by both data and practitioner insight. This PoP will serve as the foundation for your Dissertation in Practice.

Converting a broad area of interest into a focused, researchable problem is often one of the most challenging—but most important—early steps in the dissertation process. You are encouraged to seek input from faculty, peers, and colleagues with experience in related areas to ensure your topic is appropriately scoped and feasible to complete within the program timeline.

When selecting a PoP, keep the following considerations in mind:

- **Ethical Responsibility**: If your research site is also your place of employment, special attention must be paid to the **ethical implications** of conducting research within your organization—especially if you hold a position of authority over potential participants. Program coordinators are available to assist in addressing issues of consent, power dynamics, and confidentiality.
- **Rigor and Relevance**: While personal passion and professional relevance are essential, your proposed PoP must meet academic standards of **rigor, significance, and alignment** with the goals of the EdD program in School Improvement. All topics are subject to faculty review to determine whether they are suitably complex, impactful, and situated in Improvement Science logic.
- **System-Level Framing**: Your PoP should reflect a systems problem, not a simple technical challenge. It should relate to patterns of variation, persistent barriers, or design flaws in organizational routines, and hold the potential to generate learning across contexts.

At the end of **Phase 1** (typically the end of Year 1), you will submit your potential dissertation topic—including completed drafts of **Chapters 1 and 2**—to the Program

Director and core faculty for review. Upon approval, you will be matched with a **dissertation chair and committee** based on your topic and methodological needs.

Dissertation Chair and Committee

Dissertation Chair Responsibilities

The Dissertation Chair serves as your primary guide throughout the development of your Dissertation in Practice. Responsibilities include:

- Providing mentorship to support the development of a rigorous and scholarly dissertation aligned with **UT Tyler** and **School of Education (SOE)** policies.
- Offering feedback on dissertation structure, content, research design, and writing quality.
- Assisting in meeting dissertation **milestones**, deadlines, and university requirements.
- Preparing you for a successful **oral defense**.
- Supporting publication of your dissertation or its component chapters, when appropriate.
- Ensuring that all ethical research practices, **IRB procedures**, and university protocols are followed.
- Being accessible and responsive in providing **timely feedback** and guidance.

Dissertation Committee Responsibilities

The Dissertation Committee is composed of faculty members with relevant content expertise and methodological experience. Their role is to:

- Guide you through the dissertation process by contributing collective knowledge in your topic area and research design.
- Review and approve all dissertation chapters, ensuring scholarly standards are met.
- Participate in the dissertation defense and determine readiness for approval.
- Facilitate high-level feedback while ensuring the project remains aligned to the mission of the EdD program.

Note: If a change in committee membership is needed, the student must consult with the Program Coordinator and Chair. Committee adjustments must be formally approved.

Dissertation Seminar and Defense

Dissertation Seminar

- The seminar is a structured **Independent Study** embedded in the program sequence.

- It exists to **monitor progress**, support writing, and ensure timely completion of the dissertation by the end of coursework.
- Students are expected to adhere to a structured **chapter development timeline** and revise continuously based on feedback.
- If the dissertation is not completed by the end of **Phase 3 (Year 3)**, students must remain continuously enrolled in dissertation continuation, with a **minimum tuition charge equivalent to one credit hour per semester** until successful defense.

Dissertation Defense

- The dissertation defense is a formal **oral presentation** of your research to your full Dissertation Committee and members of the UT Tyler academic community.
- The defense must cover the **purpose**, **significance**, **methodology**, **findings**, and **recommendations** of your study.
- The Chair and Committee members determine whether the dissertation is ready for defense and make one of the following decisions:
    - Approve with no revisions
    - Approve with minor revisions
    - Not yet approved (requires further revision before resubmission)
- **Unanimous approval** from the Committee is required before the dissertation can be submitted to the Graduate School and the degree conferred.

Structure of the Dissertation

The Dissertation in Practice must adhere to the highest standards of academic writing and presentation.

- The dissertation must follow the most recent edition of the **APA Publication Manual** for citations, formatting, and stylistic conventions.
- All **figures, tables, and diagrams** should be accurately labeled, integrated into the text, and referenced appropriately.
- **Transitions, headings, and organizational flow** should be clear and logical, guiding the reader through the complex problem-solving process of your dissertation.

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The Problem of Practice

In the EdD in School Improvement program, the **Problem of Practice (PoP)** serves as the foundation for your Dissertation in Practice. It defines the focus of your inquiry, guides your data collection and analysis, and shapes the change ideas you will explore. A clearly articulated PoP not only sharpens your research focus but ensures that your work is **relevant, rigorous, and responsive** to the needs of students and systems.

Identifying the right PoP is one of the most important steps in the dissertation process. It requires balancing professional passion with empirical evidence, ethical judgment, and alignment to the mission of your school or district. The PoP should reflect a challenge that **persists despite prior efforts**, impacts students in meaningful ways, and has the potential for **system-level learning and improvement**.

Criteria for a Strong Problem of Practice

1. **Contextual Relevance**
   The PoP should be rooted in a specific educational context—such as a campus, district, or educational program. It must reflect an authentic challenge currently experienced by students, teachers, or administrators.
2. **Complexity and Persistence**
   The issue should be **complex**, meaning it cannot be resolved with a single intervention or technical fix. It should **persist despite previous efforts**, signaling the need for a deeper systems-level inquiry.
3. **High Leverage**
   The problem should be high-impact. Solving it should lead to measurable gains in **student learning, teacher effectiveness, organizational culture, or systemic performance**.
4. **Evidence-Based Framing**
   The PoP must be supported by **data**, including both quantitative (e.g., test scores, attendance rates) and qualitative sources (e.g., interviews, observations). Visual tools such as **Pareto Charts** can help prioritize contributing factors.
5. **Student-Centered Focus**
   While adult behaviors and organizational processes may be part of the system, the ultimate goal must be to improve **student outcomes**, experience, and equity of opportunity.
6. **Alignment with Organizational Goals**
   The PoP should align with the strategic goals of your educational setting. It

should reinforce or inform existing improvement plans and be relevant to district or school accountability targets.

7. **Ethical Considerations**
   Your research must be grounded in ethical inquiry, including respect for participants, transparency, and appropriate handling of confidential data. If you hold a leadership role, power dynamics must be addressed and mitigated.

Example: Problem of Practice in Literacy

Low Reading Proficiency Among Elementary Students

- **Contextual Relevance**:
  At XYZ Elementary School, a substantial percentage of third-grade students consistently read below grade level, limiting their engagement and achievement across content areas.
- **Complexity and Persistence**:
  Despite implementing multiple reading interventions over five years, reading scores have not improved. The issue continues to affect a broad cross-section of students.
- **High Leverage**:
  Improving reading proficiency could enhance performance across subjects, boost confidence, and support long-term academic success for students.
- **Evidence-Based Framing**:
  State reading assessment data and in-class performance metrics demonstrate a widespread issue. Teacher interviews and classroom observations suggest a lack of differentiation for struggling readers. A Pareto Chart reveals that 80% of issues stem from instructional mismatches.
- **Student-Centered Focus**:
  The primary goal is to ensure third-grade students can read at or above grade level by year-end.
- **Alignment with Organizational Goals**:
  The district's strategic plan highlights third-grade reading as a top priority, making this PoP both timely and mission-aligned.
- **Ethical Considerations**:
  The research will include informed consent, protect student confidentiality, and ensure that interventions do not disrupt instruction or stigmatize learners.

Structure and Purpose of Each Chapter

The Dissertation in Practice (DiP) is organized into five chapters, each aligned with the **Improvement Science** framework. These chapters guide you through a systems-level analysis of a persistent Problem of Practice (PoP), the evaluation of that problem, the design and testing of change efforts, and reflection on the impact of those efforts.

Each chapter serves a specific function and builds upon the one before it. Below is an overview of what each chapter must include and why it is critical to your Improvement Science dissertation.

Refer to the detailed chapter checklists and evaluation rubric in the Appendix for guidance on formatting, structure, and content expectations.

Chapter 1: The Problem of Practice

This chapter defines and analyzes the problem you will investigate. It introduces your setting, establishes the importance of the problem, and uses Improvement Science tools to surface root causes.

Required Sections:

1. **Introduction**
   Introduce the Dissertation in Practice as an Improvement Science project. Describe the PDSA cycle and the two-phase design (evaluation followed by intervention).
2. **Background of the Problem**
   Provide contextual details, including district demographics, school size, and setting.
3. **Statement and Definition of the Problem**
   Define the PoP clearly and include data-supported evidence of its persistence and impact. Use tools like **Pareto Charts** to prioritize contributing factors.
4. **Purpose and Significance of the Study**
   Align the PoP with campus/district strategic goals. Describe the broader relevance for other schools or systems.
5. **The System**
   - **Systems Map**: Visual of organizational structures influencing the PoP.
   - **Process Mapping**: Current routines or workflows connected to the PoP.
6. **Root Cause Analysis**
   - **Fishbone Diagram**: Identify 3–5 root causes.
   - **5 Whys**: Drill down to underlying contributors.
   - **Empathy Interviews**: Gather stakeholder insights and user perspectives.
7. **Positionality**
   - **Personal**: Reflect on how your identity shapes your view of the PoP.
   - **Professional**: Describe your role in the system and its influence on the research.

    - **Mitigation**: Explain how bias will be addressed.
8. **Evaluation Plan and Intervention Proposal**
   Preview your mixed-methods evaluation and potential change ideas, which will be developed fully in Chapters 3 and 4.

Chapter 2: Review of Scholarly and Professional Knowledge

This chapter synthesizes research literature and practitioner knowledge to understand the PoP and identify evidence-based improvement strategies.

Required Sections:

1. **Review Methodology**
   Describe your process for identifying and selecting sources.
2. **Student Lens**
   Summarize literature on how the PoP impacts student experiences and outcomes.
3. **Adult Lens**
   Summarize literature on how the PoP relates to adult behaviors and organizational practices.
4. **Working Theory of Improvement**
   Present a **Driver Diagram** that connects your root causes to proposed change efforts.
5. **Publication**
   Format this chapter to align with scholarly publication standards.

Chapter 3: Evaluation of the Problem of Practice

This chapter describes how the PoP was evaluated prior to intervention. You will explain your research design and provide early-stage findings based on both qualitative and quantitative data.

Required Sections:

1. **Introduction**
   Explain the chapter's alignment with Improvement Science and PDSA.
2. **Research Questions**
   Frame questions using improvement logic (variation, system performance, user experience).
3. **Target Population and Participants**
   Describe sampling, inclusion/exclusion, and access considerations.
4. **Current Intervention Being Evaluated**
   If any partial interventions are already in place, describe them.
5. **Research Methodology**
   Justify a **mixed-methods embedded experimental design**.

6. **Research Design**
   Detail design logic, alignment with Improvement Science, and rationale.
7. **Data Collection and Analysis**
   - **IS Tools**: PDSA cycles, run charts, control charts, process and Pareto charts, empathy interviews
   - **Qualitative**: Interviews, focus groups, observations, document analysis, thematic coding
   - **Quantitative**: Surveys, descriptive and inferential statistics, visualizations
8. **Networked Improvement Communities (NICs)**
   Describe NIC engagement and any collaborative learning.
9. **Results**
   Present analyzed data with clear visuals and synthesis.
10. **Discussion**
    Explain the meaning of your findings and their system-level implications.
11. **Limitations**
    Address potential threats to validity and researcher bias.
12. **Manuscript Format**
    Prepare the chapter for publication if appropriate.

Chapter 4: Evaluation of the Intervention

This chapter presents your intervention, explains how it was implemented, and evaluates whether it produced improvement.

Required Sections:

1. **Introduction**
   Restate the PoP and summarize the intervention design and purpose.
2. **Research Questions and Population**
   Focus on the change effort and define your participant sample.
3. **Research Methodology and Design**
   Describe your **embedded experimental design**, blending qual + quant data.
4. **Data Collection and Analysis**
   - **IS Tools**: PDSA cycles, run/control charts, driver and affinity diagrams, process maps, empathy interviews
   - **Qualitative**: Interviews, focus groups, observations, document review
   - **Quantitative**: Pre/post data, surveys, descriptive/inferential statistics, visual displays
5. **Results**
   Present data clearly and synthesize trends across data types.
6. **Summary of Results**
   Connect all results back to the original PoP and drivers.
7. **Networked Improvement Communities (NICs)**
   Share insights and collaborative work with your NIC.
8. **Manuscript Format**
   Prepare content in alignment with publishing expectations.

Chapter 5: Discussion of the Results

This chapter brings the study to a close by discussing the implications of your findings, recommending future actions, and reflecting on your professional learning.

Required Sections:

1. **Introduction**
   Summarize the purpose and structure of Chapter 5.
2. **Discussion of the Results**
   Analyze your results through the lens of systems thinking and relevant literature.
3. **Recommendations for Practice and Further Study**
   Offer local and generalizable recommendations. Propose a future PDSA cycle.
4. **Conclusion**
   Reflect on the PoP, the intervention, your professional growth, and what comes next.

Copyright and Integrity

- **Copyright**: Your work is protected under federal copyright law. Any publication, presentation, or use beyond UT Tyler must include proper attribution.
- **Academic Integrity**: The School of Education expects the highest standards of academic integrity throughout your dissertation. Use of AI tools, editorial services, and peer support must align with UT Tyler's policies on ethical authorship and transparency.

Reminder: Refer to the detailed **Chapter Checklists** and **Literature Review Rubric** in the **Appendix** for clear, itemized expectations and evaluation criteria.

Dissertation Timeline and Course Alignment

The EdD Dissertation in Practice is embedded within a structured sequence of coursework, field experiences, and writing milestones across three years. This section outlines the **phases of dissertation development**, expected deliverables, and how those align with course enrollment and faculty availability.

Due to faculty contracts and scheduling constraints, dissertation committee review, IRB approval, and formal evaluation work are **not expected or required during the Summer following Year 1**. Instead, **committee approval and IRB clearance will occur in the Fall of Year 2**, with Phase 1 evaluation data collection beginning in **Spring of Year 2**.

Overview of Dissertation Phases

Phase	Timing	Focus
Orientation	Summer before Year 1	IRB training, initial PoP selection
Phase 1	Year 1	Define PoP, develop Chapters 1 & 2
Phase 2	Year 2	Evaluation of PoP (Chapter 3), design intervention
Phase 3	Year 3	Implement and evaluate intervention (Ch. 4–5), defense

Course Alignment and Major Milestones

Orientation (Summer 0)

- Identify preliminary **Problem of Practice**
- Complete **IRB ethics modules**
- Begin literature review and Improvement Science onboarding

Phase 1 – Define the Problem (Year 1)

Fall 1:

- Coursework: Quantitative & Qualitative Research Methods
- Begin framing the PoP and early literature exploration

Spring 1:

- Coursework: Program Evaluation, Improvement Science, Dissertation Seminar
- Submit draft **Chapters 1 and 2**
- Draft IRB proposal (not submitted yet)

Summer 1:

- PoP Presentation to Faculty
- Committee Chair assigned; Committee formed
- Submit final drafts of Chapters 1 and 2 to Chair for approval to proceed and IRB Submission **(May also occur in Fall 2)**
- **Attend Summer Residency**
- Begin feedback loop for IRB preparation (but IRB not required until Fall 2)

Phase 2 – Evaluate the Problem (Year 2)

Fall 2:

- Coursework: Data-Driven Planning, Pedagogy for School Improvement, Dissertation Seminar
- **Committee formally approves dissertation plan and evaluation methodology**
- **Submit IRB for formal approval**
- Revise Chapters 1–3 as needed based on committee feedback

Spring 2:

- Begin Phase 1 data collection for **evaluation of the current system** (Chapter 3)
- Analyze findings using qualitative, quantitative, and Improvement Science tools

Summer 2:

- Complete and submit Chapter 3 to Committee
- **Present findings** to Committee; receive approval for proposed intervention
- **Attend Summer Residency**
- **Submit Chapter 2 for potential publication**

Phase 3 – Evaluate the Intervention (Year 3)

Fall 3:

- Implement change idea using PDSA and Improvement Science design
- Begin data collection for Chapter 4 (intervention evaluation)

Spring 3:

- Complete Chapter 4 and revise as needed
- Apply for **Dissertation Defense**
- **Submit Chapter 3** for publication

Summer 3:

- Complete Chapter 5, abstract, and final formatting
- Defend Dissertation
- Attend **Final Summer Residency/Policy Summit in Austin**
- Submit to Graduate School

Optional Extension: Fall IV (If Needed)

- Final revisions and defense (if not completed in Summer 3)
- Submit approved dissertation to Graduate School

Course and Dissertation Alignment

Semester	Research Sequence	School Improvement Sequence	Dissertation Completion Sequence	Residency Requirements
Summer 0	N/A	N/A	PoP Development, Begin Literature Review	UT Tyler (Orientation)
Fall I	EDRM 6352 – Quantitative Research Methods EDRM 6353 – Qualitative Research Methods	N/A	Continue Literature Review	N/A
Spring I	EDRM 6350 – Program Evaluation EDSI 6312 – Improvement Science EDSI 6160 – Dissertation Seminar	Draft Chapters 1 and 2	Submit Draft IRB Plan (not submitted)	Online
Summer I	EDRM 6351 – DBIR EDSI 6313 – Accountability Models EDSI 6160 – Dissertation Seminar	Finalize Chapter 1 Begin Chapter 3 (Design Section)	PoP Presentation, Committee Assigned, Feedback on IRB Plan	UT Tyler
Fall II	N/A	EDSI 6311 – Data-Driven Planning EDSI 6314 – Pedagogy for SI EDSI 6161 – Dissertation Seminar	Committee Approval of PoP & Evaluation Plan Submit IRB for Approval	Online
Spring II	EDRM 6354 – Learning Analytics	EDSI 6321 – Support Systems EDSI 6161 –	Collect Evaluation Data (Chapter 3)	Online

Semester	Research Sequence	School Improvement Sequence	Dissertation Completion Sequence	Residency Requirements
		Dissertation Seminar	Analyze and Revise Chapters 1–3	
Summer II	N/A	EDSI 6323 – Instructional Supervision EDSI 6322 – Culturally Responsive Practice EDSI 6161 – Dissertation Seminar	Chapter 3 Completed Committee Review Submit Chapter 2 for Publication	UT Tyler
Fall III	N/A	EDSI 6320 – Critical Conversations EDSI 6330 – School Culture EDSI 6162 – Dissertation Seminar	Begin Intervention Implementation (Chapter 4) Collect Early Data	Online
Spring III	N/A	EDSI 6331 – Policy and SI EDSI 6360 – Dissertation	Complete Chapter 4 Apply for Defense Submit Chapter 3 for Publication	Online
Summer III	N/A	EDSI 6370 – Policy Residency EDSI 6360 – Dissertation	Complete Chapter 5 Defend and Submit Dissertation	Austin, TX
Fall IV *(if needed)*	N/A	N/A	EDSI 6163 – Dissertation Continuation Defense and Submission	As scheduled

Institutional Review Board (IRB) Approval

Before beginning any research involving human participants, EdD students must obtain **Institutional Review Board (IRB) approval** from both **The University of Texas at Tyler** and—if applicable—their **school district or external research site**. This process ensures the ethical treatment of participants and compliance with federal and institutional research standards.

Failure to secure required approvals before data collection will result in the invalidation of the study and may lead to disciplinary consequences.

University IRB Approval

All EdD candidates are required to complete the following:

1. **Training**
   Complete UT Tyler's required IRB training modules (e.g., CITI Program). These cover human subjects protections, informed consent, data confidentiality, and researcher responsibilities.
2. **Application**
   Submit a complete IRB application to the UT Tyler IRB Office. Your application should include:
   - Description of the Problem of Practice
   - Purpose of the study
   - Research design and methodology
   - Participant recruitment plan
   - Consent and assent forms
   - Data protection and storage procedures
3. **Approval**
   Do not begin any data collection until written IRB approval is received from the university. Your IRB approval letter is a required artifact in your dissertation file.

School District or Site IRB Approval

If you are conducting research in a school, district, or other organization:

1. **Review District Policies**
   Investigate your district's or site's research approval process. Each may have unique forms, timelines, or IRB equivalents.
2. **Application Submission**
   Provide the district with:
   - A copy of your university IRB approval letter
   - Research Plan
   - Any supplemental forms they require

3. **District Approval**
   Wait for official written approval from the site before beginning any engagement with participants.

Documentation and Reporting

- **Maintain Records**: Keep digital and physical copies of all:
  - IRB training certificates
  - UT Tyler IRB application and approval
  - Site/district approval documentation
- **Submit to Committee**: Provide your Chair and Committee with copies of all IRB approval letters to verify compliance.

Ethical Reminder

The UT Tyler School of Education holds the highest standards for ethical research. You are expected to:

- Protect participant confidentiality
- Respect all consent/assent protocols
- Avoid dual-role coercion (especially if you supervise participants)
- Follow your approved protocols precisely
- Submit IRB amendments if your project changes

IRB compliance is not optional—it is a cornerstone of credible, publishable, and professional doctoral research.

Approval from Dissertation Chair and Methodologist

In addition to receiving Institutional Review Board (IRB) approval, students must also obtain written approval from both their **Dissertation Chair** and a designated **Methodologist** before initiating any data collection. These approvals ensure that your research design meets academic, methodological, and ethical standards.

Approval Process

1. **Problem of Practice Evaluation Approval**
   - Provide the Chair and Committee with Draft Chapters 1, 2, and part 1 of 3.
     ▪ Research questions
     ▪ Appropriate Frameworks (Improvement Science, theoretical, conceptual, etc.)
     ▪ Methodology
     ▪ Instruments and sampling strategies
     ▪ Data collection and analysis plans
   - These chapters form the basis of faculty review and must be approved prior to IRB submission or data collection.

2. **Dissertation Chair Review**
    - **Submission**: Send your completed chapters to your Dissertation Chair.
    - **Feedback**: Revise the chapters as needed based on Chair feedback.
    - **Approval**: Obtain approval from the Chair, confirming that your research is conceptually sound and feasible.
3. **Methodologist Review**
    - **Identification**: Based on your methodology, consult with a faculty expert in **quantitative**, **qualitative**, or **mixed-methods** research.
    - **Consultation**: The methodologist will evaluate your research design for rigor, appropriateness, and alignment with your questions.

Documentation

- **Keep Records**: Save a copy of your chair approval to proceed.

NOTE: Collecting data without the required faculty and IRB approvals may result in academic sanctions and the invalidation of your research.

Dissertation Committee Meeting Schedule

Regular meetings with your Dissertation Committee are essential for ensuring progress, accountability, and scholarly rigor throughout the Dissertation in Practice process. The schedule below outlines key milestones and expectations. While there is no formal proposal defense, students will complete and present foundational elements (Chapters 1, 2, and the initial evaluation design) during the **Summer Residency**, which serves as the basis for committee assignment and subsequent approvals.

Meeting	Timing	Purpose
1. Initial Committee Meeting	No later than **September 15** (after summer committee assignment)	Introduce committee members, confirm the scope of the Problem of Practice, clarify member roles, and review expectations and working timelines.
2. POP Evaluation Approval Meeting	No later than **Fall of Year 2**	Review the student's refined evaluation plan, grounded in Chapters 1 and 2 plus early Chapter 3 design. Provide feedback and formally approve the evaluation study to proceed.
3. IRB Approval Meeting	After university and site IRB approvals are received	Verify IRB compliance and confirm all ethical procedures. Ensure readiness for data collection aligned to the approved evaluation plan.
4. Mid-Project Progress Check	Midway through data collection (Chapter 3 or 4)	Share implementation progress, discuss emerging issues, and determine whether any adjustments are needed to the timeline, data collection tools, or focus.

Meeting	Timing	Purpose
5. Preliminary Findings Review	After initial data analysis is complete	Review early findings, discuss themes and patterns, and confirm analytic rigor. This step supports synthesis and planning for final chapters.
6. Chapter Draft Reviews	After drafts of **Chapters 3 and 4** are submitted	Provide targeted feedback on content, alignment, and writing quality. Ensure dissertation structure meets scholarly expectations and program standards.
7. Final Defense Preparation	Approximately **one month before the final defense**	Confirm all chapters and appendices are finalized. Prepare for the oral defense presentation. Discuss logistics, submission timeline, and Graduate School requirements.
8. Final Dissertation Defense	As scheduled with committee and UT Tyler Graduate School	Present the full dissertation in a formal defense. The committee must reach unanimous agreement for degree conferral.

Documentation and Communication Expectations

- **Meeting Records**: Students should keep detailed notes from each meeting, including dates, attendance, feedback, and action items.
- **Committee Communication**: Maintain regular contact with your Chair and committee members through updates, email correspondence, and milestone tracking.
- **Feedback Response**: Incorporate all feedback in a timely and scholarly manner. Document revisions to demonstrate responsiveness and academic growth.

This progressive, faculty-guided approach ensures dissertation quality and scholarly integrity without relying on a traditional proposal defense structure.

Publishing Your Dissertation

The Dissertation in Practice often yields publishable insights, findings, and methods relevant to PK–12 education, leadership, and systems change. Students are strongly encouraged to publish portions of their dissertation, either during or after completion of the program.

Including Faculty as Co-Authors

In accordance with ethical standards in academic publishing, students must acknowledge faculty who made **significant intellectual or methodological contributions** by offering co-authorship.

Criteria for Co-Authorship

Faculty should be invited to serve as co-authors if they:

1. **Made a Substantial Contribution**
    - Played a meaningful role in the conception, design, execution, or interpretation of the research
    - Provided methodological expertise, analysis support, or extensive intellectual feedback
2. **Participated in Manuscript Development**
    - Drafted, revised, or reviewed portions of the manuscript
    - Contributed meaningfully to the interpretation and communication of results
3. **Approved the Final Manuscript**
    - Reviewed and consented to the final version prior to submission
    - Are willing to take responsibility for their portion of the content

Acknowledging Contributions

- **Dissertation Chair and Committee Members**
  Chairs and committee members frequently meet co-authorship criteria. This should be discussed during the writing phase to avoid confusion or omission.
- **Other Supporting Faculty**
  Faculty outside the committee who provided significant input—such as feedback on data analysis or writing—should also be considered.
- **Acknowledgements vs. Authorship**
  Individuals who offered general support but did not meet the co-authorship threshold (e.g., minor editing or encouragement) should be named in the acknowledgements section, not as co-authors.

Ethical Considerations in Co-Authorship

1. **Transparency and Communication**
   Initiate authorship discussions early. Be explicit about roles, contributions, and expectations.
2. **Authorship Order**
   Order should reflect level of contribution and be agreed upon by all co-authors. Typically, the **student is first author** unless a faculty member leads publication by agreement.
3. **Optional Faculty-Led Publication**
   If the student cannot publish due to time or capacity constraints, they may grant a faculty member (typically the Chair) permission to lead the writing and submission process. In such cases:
    - The student must remain a co-author
    - The arrangement must be **mutually agreed upon in advance**

Steps for Managing Co-Authorship

1. **Identify Co-Authors**
   Based on contribution criteria, determine who should be invited to join as a co-author.
2. **Initiate Conversations Early**
   Clarify expectations, timeline, and intended journals before writing begins.
3. **Draft the Manuscript Collaboratively**
   Ensure co-authors are included in drafting, revising, and reviewing key content areas.
4. **Determine Authorship Order**
   Document agreement on author order to prevent disputes later.
5. **Obtain Final Approval**
   Secure email or written consent from all authors prior to submission.
6. **Retain Records**
   Keep documentation of authorship agreements, final manuscript versions, and email approvals.

By recognizing the contributions of your Dissertation Chair, Committee members, and other supporting faculty through co-authorship, and by maintaining ethical authorship practices, you contribute to a **collaborative and transparent academic community**.

List of Appendices

Appendix A: Responsible Use of AI in EdD Research and Writing

Program Guidelines

As part of our practice-based, school improvement-focused EdD program, we support the responsible and ethical use of Artificial Intelligence (AI) to support, not replace, scholarly thinking and academic writing. AI can enhance productivity, improve clarity, and aid in literature review or data interpretation. However, its use must align with academic integrity policies and research ethics.

Permitted Uses (AI as Research and Writing Assistant)

AI tools may be used to:

- Brainstorm research questions or intervention ideas
- Refine writing for clarity, tone, and APA formatting
- Outline chapters or summarize large blocks of text
- Design instruments such as surveys, interview protocols, or observation checklists
- Interpret results from descriptive or inferential statistics
- Code qualitative data by identifying themes or patterns
- Summarize articles or documents (with proper citation)
- Organize references using APA tools or citation formatting assistants
- Support Improvement Science methods, including PDSA planning, driver diagrams, and theories of action logic

Think of AI as a research assistant—not as a co-author or replacement for your own analysis.

Prohibited Uses (Violations of Scholarly Integrity)

AI tools must **not** be used to:

- Generate entire dissertation sections or submit AI-generated content as original work
- Fabricate citations, data, or sources
- Bypass critical engagement with research or practice settings
- Upload IRB-sensitive or identifiable data (e.g., student responses, test scores)
- Plagiarize, paraphrase without understanding, or misrepresent AI-generated summaries as your own

Academic Integrity Statement

You are responsible for:

- Verifying the accuracy of all AI-generated outputs
- Citing sources appropriately—even when found via AI tools
- Maintaining confidentiality and adhering to IRB-approved data protections

Guiding Principle:
"Use AI to scaffold your thinking, not to substitute for your scholarship."

AI Toolkit for EdD Students: Research & Writing Support

The following tools may support your scholarly efforts throughout the dissertation process.

Tool	Best For	Key Features
ChatGPT	Writing, tools, Improvement Science	Framework Finder, Rubric Aligner, APA Assistant
Google Gemini	Brainstorming, trend analysis	Web-based inquiry assistant
ChatPDF	Article summarization	Interact with uploaded PDFs
Claude	Long document summarization, interview coding	Handles transcripts and theme generation
Perplexity AI	Research with citations	Real-time web access, linked sources
Julius	Data analysis and visualizations	Upload datasets, plain-language analysis
SciSpace	Understanding academic articles	Simplifies technical texts
Recite	Citation formatting	Instant APA/MLA/Chicago formatting
Google NotebookLM	Custom AI trained on your documents	Suggests insights from your uploads
Consensus	Evidence-based synthesis	Peer-reviewed answers to research questions
ResearchRabbit	Expanding lit reviews, research networks	Visual maps of topics, authors, themes

Appendix B: Collaborative Authorship

University of Texas at Tyler

EdD Dissertation Research Collaborative Authorship Memorandum of Understanding

This Memorandum of Understanding (MOU) sets forth the points of agreement between the joint authors of the EdD dissertation research titled: _____ regarding corresponding author order of authorship designation and responsibilities of each contributor to the final product. This MOU explains standards for inclusion as an author as defined by the Committee on Publication Ethics (COPE) guidelines for authorship and contributorship. For more information, please visit the COPE website at https://publicationethics.org.

Authorship Criteria: Decisions to include or exclude persons in authorship will be based on meeting all four of the following conditions:

- Substantial contributions to the conception or design of the work; or the acquisition, analysis, or interpretation of data for the work; AND
- Drafting the work or revising it critically for important intellectual content; AND
- Final approval of the version to be published; AND
- Agreement to be accountable for all aspects of the work in ensuring that questions related to the accuracy or integrity of any part of the work are appropriately investigated and resolved.

Guidelines for Adverse Circumstances: In the event of conflicts or other adverse circumstances that interfere with timely completion of the manuscript, the following guidelines are offered:

1. After approximately 21 business days following unsuccessful and repeated communication attempts to determine the status of the manuscript, if the primary author has not initiated or moved the manuscript forward, the remaining authors reserve the right to assume ownership of the content and proceed with publishing, with the knowledge that no other adverse circumstances have prevented communications between the primary author and co-authors.
2. After approximately 21 business days following unsuccessful and repeated attempts to determine the status of the manuscript, if a co-author has not initiated or moved the assigned portion of the manuscript forward, the remaining authors reserve the right to assume ownership of the content and proceed with publishing.

Author Sequence and Contributions: The following authors are included in the production of this manuscript. The numerical designation beside each name is understood as the sequenced position that person will hold in the final listing of authorship when the article is published. It is understood that this designation may change based on actual contributions to the article, at which time another MOU will be signed. Regardless of who is the first author, the EdD student who created the dissertation will be one of the authors, typically the second author.

Author Sequence	Name of Author	Expected Contribution to Manuscript
Corresponding Author		
#1 First Author		
#2 EdD Student		
#3 Third Author		
#4 Fourth Author		
#5 Fifth Author		
#6 Sixth Author		

Responsibilities:

- **Corresponding Author:** This person is either the primary author or the person who may have had substantial mentoring contributions and/or whose manuscript focuses on original ideas of the corresponding author.
- **First Author:** It is generally understood that the first author is the person who led the research or study and who initiated and made a major contribution to the published work. Disputes will be handled by the FIRST AUTHOR. Unresolved disputes may be taken to persons in the following order given that the person in the chain of authority has no role in the manuscript: Department Chair, College Dean, Provost, and President.
- **EdD Student:** The EdD student who created the dissertation will be recognized as one of the authors, typically listed as the second author, in acknowledgment of their substantial contribution to the work.

Eligible Faculty: The following eligible faculty members, including committee members and any SOE faculty that provided support for the dissertation (including Methodology Experts who did not necessarily serve on the committee), are acknowledged for their contributions:

Faculty Role	Name of Faculty Member	Contribution to Dissertation
Committee Chair		
Committee Member		
Committee Member		
Committee Member		
Methodology Expert		
SOE Faculty Support		

This MOU is initiated by the FIRST AUTHOR. A signed copy from each co-author should be kept with the manuscript records.

Signatures: I understand and agree with the publication plan contained in this MOU.
Corresponding Author:
_____ Date:_____ Printed name:
Contributing Authors:
_____ Date:_____ Printed name:
_____ Date:_____ Printed name:
_____ Date:_____ Printed name:
_____ Date:_____ Printed name:

Appendix C: EdD Course Rotation (2025–2031)

The following rotation provides an overview of course offerings for students enrolled in the Ed.D. in School Improvement program at The University of Texas at Tyler. This plan ensures that all required coursework is available in a structured, predictable format over a multi-year cycle. Students should consult with program faculty for any schedule updates.

Semester	Course Number	Course Title
Fall Odd	EDRM 6352	Quantitative Research Methods in the Education Setting
	EDRM 6353	Qualitative Methods in the Education Setting
Spring Even	EDRM 6350	Program Evaluation in the Education Setting
	EDSI 6312	The Study and Application of Improvement Science
	EDSI 6160	Dissertation (Synchronous)
Summer Even	EDRM 6351	Design-Based Implementation Research
	EDSI 6313	School Improvement & Accountability Models
	EDSI 6160	Dissertation (Face to Face)
Fall Even	EDSI 6311	Data-Driven Planning for School Improvement
	EDSI 6314	Research-Based Pedagogies for School Improvement
	EDSI 6161	Dissertation (Synchronous)
Spring Odd	EDRM 6354	Learning Analytics
	EDSI 6321	Support Systems for Job-Embedded Professional Learning
	EDSI 6161	Dissertation (Synchronous)
Summer Odd	EDSI 6323	Instructional Supervision for School Improvement
	EDSI 6322	Culturally Responsive Practices for School Improvement
	EDSI 6161	Dissertation (Face to Face)
Fall Odd	EDSI 6320	Leading Critical Conversations for School Improvement
	EDSI 6330	School Culture & Community Engagement for SI
	EDSI 6162	Dissertation (Synchronous)
Spring Even	EDSI 6331	Educational Policy and School Improvement
	EDSI 6360	Dissertation
Summer Even	EDSI 6370	School Improvement Policy Residency (Face to Face - Austin)
	EDSI 6360	Dissertation
Fall IV (As Needed)	EDSI 6163	Dissertation (Extended Enrollment)

Appendix D: Observation Protocol Guidance for EdD Students in School Improvement

Purpose

Observation protocols allow researchers to collect consistent, structured data on classroom or organizational practices. In EdD improvement studies, these are often used to assess instructional implementation, engagement, or fidelity to interventions.

1. Use Existing Protocols First

In most cases, students should use or adapt an existing observation tool—especially if one is already in use at their site.

Common Options in Texas:

- **T-TESS (Texas Teacher Evaluation and Support System)**
  - Official statewide protocol for observing teacher practice
  - Useful for understanding classroom environment, planning, and instructional delivery
- **R-TOP (Reformed Teaching Observation Protocol)**
  - Designed for evaluating inquiry-based and student-centered instruction, particularly in STEM
  - Widely used in education research

Other Options to Explore:

- **Danielson Framework** – Common across many districts; domain-based rubric
- **CLASS (Classroom Assessment Scoring System)** – Used for early childhood and K–3 classrooms
- **Custom Walkthrough Forms** – Often developed internally by districts or schools

2. Adapt if Needed (With Site Input)

If no protocol fits your study exactly:

- Adapt an existing one—remove irrelevant domains, combine with checklist items, or create focus areas based on your evaluation questions.
- Collaborate with site personnel to ensure your adaptation is appropriate for local norms.
- Document your adaptations clearly in your methodology chapter.

3. Develop Your Own Only as a Last Resort

If creating a new protocol:

- Anchor your items in research-based indicators of effective practice (draw from literature review).
- Keep it simple (e.g., checklist, frequency counts, or 1–4 rating scale).
- Pilot test for clarity and consistency.

4. Observer Calibration & Reliability

Even with informal tools:

- Use the same observer (yourself) for consistency, or
- Train co-observers using examples and practice observations.
- Note limitations of reliability in your write-up.

5. Link to Your Evaluation Questions

Each observation item should align directly with:

- A key driver, change idea, or
- An evaluation question from your Improvement Science framework

Final Tips

- Use **field notes** alongside structured protocols to capture qualitative insights.
- Always secure **permission** from sites for classroom or workplace observations.
- Consider **observation timing** (e.g., multiple timepoints during PDSA cycles).

“Don’t reinvent the wheel—observe with purpose, using tools that already work.”

Appendix E: Qualitative Methods for Small-Site EdD Mixed Methods Research

This guide outlines qualitative data collection strategies appropriate for small samples and single-site dissertation research in School Improvement settings.

1. Case Study

Best For: Deep, contextual understanding of a specific school, program, or team.
Data Sources: Interviews, documents, observations, artifacts.
Why It Works: Rich, multi-angle insight into a bounded system (e.g., one campus or PLC).
Tip: Use an embedded single-site case (e.g., UA STEM Lab with teacher and student subcases).

2. Document & Artifact Analysis

Best For: Policies, implementation plans, lesson plans, handbooks, school improvement plans.
Why It Works: No added burden on participants; allows longitudinal or alignment-based insights.
Tip: Align findings to your driver diagram or logic model.

3. Empathy Interviews

Best For: Understanding user experience, barriers, and perspectives.
Why It Works: Short, semi-structured, and rich with insight; underused in EdD research.
Tip: Use early to build driver diagrams and late to refine interventions.

4. Journaling or Reflective Logs

Best For: Capturing real-time implementation or mindset shifts.
Why It Works: Minimal disruption; ideal for embedded roles like coach, teacher, or admin.
Tip: Prompt example: “What did you try this week and why?”

5. Walkthrough or Field Notes

Best For: Informal snapshots of campus or classroom culture.
Why It Works: Captures norms, strategies, and engagement without formal tools.
Tip: Use brief templates aligned with intervention goals.

6. Learning Walks or Feedback Rounds

Best For: Peer or leadership insight into practice implementation.
Why It Works: Adds collective interpretation and face validity.
Tip: Debrief groups as a reflective focus group post-observation.

7. Focus Groups (Small Scale)

Best For: Shared experiences in teams or grade levels.
Why It Works: Efficient way to collect multiple views; fosters collaborative insight.
Tip: Effective mid-PDSA or for pilot feedback sessions.

8. Mini Case Comparisons

Best For: Comparing "bright spots" or divergent outcomes.
Why It Works: Adds variation even with 2–3 cases.
Tip: Use when schools or actors test different approaches.

Strategic Pairings for Triangulation

If You Have…	Pair With…	Why
Test score data	Teacher reflections/interviews	To understand the "why" behind trends
PD attendance logs	Reflective journals or walkthroughs	To evaluate fidelity and practical use
Survey responses	Focus groups	To clarify and explain patterns
Implementation artifacts	Case study or observations	To explore how policy turns into practice

"Start small, think system-wide. In small-site research, qualitative insight drives meaningful improvement."

Appendix F: Survey Design Recommendations for EdD Students in School Improvement

Purpose

In our EdD program, surveys are commonly used in mixed-methods evaluations to understand stakeholder perceptions, behaviors, or implementation fidelity. Given the applied nature of our work and tight timelines, we prioritize pragmatic, rapid development aligned with Improvement Science principles.

1. Start with Existing Validated Instruments

Check first: Before designing your own survey, explore whether existing, validated instruments measure the concept(s) you're studying (e.g., teacher efficacy, student engagement, parent involvement).

Sources:

- Academic journals
- Dissertations
- ERIC
- RAND
- Panorama Education
- MIDSS (Measurement Instrument Database for the Social Sciences)

Why: Validated surveys ensure reliability and increase the credibility of your findings.

2. Adapt When Necessary (With Caution)

You may adapt an existing instrument by:

- Shortening it to reduce survey fatigue
- Rewording items slightly to fit your context (e.g., charter vs. traditional school)

Always cite the original source and clarify what changes you made.
Do **not** change the core constructs or response formats if you want to retain comparability.

3. Create Your Own Only When Required

When no instrument exists, build your own based on:

- Theories or constructs from your literature review
- Common categories: Likert scales (attitudes), frequency scales (behavior), open-ended (narratives)

Best Practices:

- Keep it short: 10–15 questions max
- Use pilot feedback (from a colleague, teacher, or peer) to test for clarity, ambiguity, or bias

4. Align with Your Evaluation Questions

Every survey item should connect directly to an evaluation or learning question in your study.
Use Improvement Science framing to test *what works, for whom, and under what conditions*.

5. Include a Mix of Closed and Open-Ended Items

- **Closed-ended items** provide quantifiable data
- **Open-ended questions** allow for deeper insights and help triangulate findings

Tip: Use open-ended items to capture unexpected themes or stakeholder suggestions.

6. Observation Protocols (If Needed)

Consider using or adapting validated tools like:

- Danielson Framework
- CLASS (Classroom Assessment Scoring System)
- Walkthrough forms used in your district

Keep rubrics simple and aligned to what you're evaluating.
Ensure **interrater reliability** if multiple observers are involved.

Final Reminders

- Use **Qualtrics** to administer your surveys quickly
- Always obtain **site approval and participant consent**
- Document your process clearly in Chapter 3

"**Use what exists. Adapt when needed. Create only when necessary.**" — Your Dissertation Motto

Appendix G: Surveys, Focus Groups, and Interviews in EdD School Improvement Research

Purpose

In Improvement Science-based EdD studies, collecting stakeholder input is essential to understand system dynamics, evaluate change ideas, and inform next steps. This guide outlines three common qualitative and mixed-methods tools—**surveys**, **focus groups**, and **interviews**—and how to use them effectively.

Surveys

What: Standardized instruments (e.g., Likert-scale, multiple choice, open-ended)

When to Use:

- To gather broad input across a group (e.g., all teachers or parents)
- To quantify perceptions or track change across PDSA cycles

Strengths:

- Fast, scalable
- Allows comparisons across groups or over time

Limitations:

- Limited nuance or depth of insight

Use Surveys When:

- You want a snapshot of trends
- You need data from a large group
- You're comparing pre/post or across subgroups

Focus Groups

What: Facilitated small-group conversations (4–8 participants)

When to Use:

- To explore themes from survey responses
- To examine shared experiences or group dynamics

Strengths:

- Rich dialogue
- Peer interaction generates ideas

Limitations:

- May inhibit candor due to group presence
- Not generalizable

Use Focus Groups When:

- You want to co-construct meaning with participants
- You want to refine ideas or validate survey results
- You're building system understanding in early stages

Interviews

What: One-on-one, semi-structured conversations

When to Use:

- To explore individual experience in depth
- To understand outliers or decision-making

Strengths:

- Deep insight
- Effective for sensitive or complex topics

Limitations:

- Time-intensive
- Harder to compare across respondents

Use Interviews When:

- You need to understand specific roles (e.g., principal, SPED teacher)
- You're following up on unexpected focus group findings
- You're mapping system behavior or testing assumptions

Using All Three: A Strategic Approach

Phase	Tool	Purpose
1. Broad Input	Survey	Capture trends and perceptions
2. Deeper Exploration	Focus Group	Unpack trends, explore shared meaning
3. Targeted Insight	Interviews	Clarify roles, understand outliers

Example Flow:

- Survey 30 teachers on PD satisfaction
  → Host focus group with 6 volunteers to unpack issues
  → Interview 3 key leaders to understand systemic barriers

Validating Surveys

- **Content Validity through Expert Review:**
  Involve subject matter experts to review whether the items comprehensively cover the intended constructs. Provide them with a short rubric or checklist focused on clarity, relevance, and alignment to your improvement goals.
- **Pilot Testing:**
  Distribute your survey to a small group from your target population before full deployment. Ask for feedback on item clarity, survey flow, and any confusing language. Use this feedback to revise the instrument.
- **Cognitive Interviewing:**
  Conduct short 1-on-1 interviews with a few participants where they "think aloud" as they answer the survey. This helps uncover how people interpret the questions and whether they're understanding them as intended.
- **Reliability Check (for Scales):**
  If using Likert-type or multi-item scales, calculate Cronbach's alpha (or similar) during your pilot phase to assess internal consistency. A score above .7 is generally acceptable for early-stage research.
- **Check for Response Biases:**
  Include a few reverse-worded items (if using scales) to identify inattentive or patterned responses.
- **Ensure Cultural and Contextual Relevance:**
  Avoid jargon or terms that may not be universally understood. Validate that the language and examples used make sense for your specific school or district context.
- **Revise Iteratively:**
  Treat validation as a recursive part of your improvement process—if your PDSA findings show confusing responses or unexpected trends, revisit and revise your survey for the next cycle.

Tips for Implementation

- **Align questions** to your evaluation framework and driver diagram
- **Use consistent protocols** for reliability
- **Clearly define your sampling strategy**—who, why, and when
- **Combine methods** for triangulation and richer findings

"Think of these tools as lenses—use each to see the system from a different angle."

Appendix H: School Improvement Summit 2025

July 10–11, 2025

Texas School Improvement Summit

Join Us

The Texas School Improvement Summit brings together educational researchers, educational leaders, and practitioners to address complex problems focused on school improvement. The conference will focus on Improvement Science as it relates to school systems, leadership, and accountability.

The summit will be hosted on the UT Tyler Campus in the Ornelas Activity Center.

Strands for This Year's Conference

- **Leadership for Improvement**
- **From Compliance to Continuous Improvement**
- **Policy for Improvement**
- **Improvement Science Research**

Event Highlights

- **Over 50 Presentations** on Texas School Improvement
- **Keynote Speaker:** Dr. Toni Lopez, Superintendent, Pasadena ISD
- **Networking** with colleagues from over 40 school districts
- **CEP Credits** available for professional educators

Location

University of Texas at Tyler
Ornelas Activity Center
3900 University Blvd
Tyler, TX 75799

Appendix I: Chapter 1 – Problem of Practice Checklist

Improvement Science Dissertation of Practice | Chapter 1 Review Checklist

🔹 0. Title and Abstract

- Title clearly reflects an Improvement Science study, not a traditional experimental or correlational research design
  Example: "Improving Early Literacy Through Iterative Curriculum Support: An Improvement Science Dissertation in Practice"
- Abstract concisely summarizes the Problem of Practice, school context, research purpose, Improvement Science approach, and proposed methods
- Tone is objective and inquiry-driven, not outcome-assuming

🔹 1. Introduction to the Study

- States that this is an Improvement Science Dissertation in Practice
- Introduces the PDSA cycle and improvement science principles
- Describes the two-phase structure of the dissertation (diagnosis → intervention)

🔹 2. Background of the Problem

- Clearly describes the school/district context (demographics, location, history, performance trends)
- Frames the problem within larger systemic or state/national trends
- Cites both peer-reviewed research and practitioner literature to situate the problem
- Provides context for why the problem matters now

🔹 3. Statement and Definition of the Problem

- Presents a specific, contextualized, student-centered Problem of Practice
- Demonstrates complexity and persistence of the problem
- Supported by multiple sources of evidence (quantitative + qualitative)
- Includes a Pareto Chart (or other visual) to identify key contributing factors
- Avoids suggesting a solution before the problem is thoroughly explored

🔹 4. Purpose and Significance

- Aligns the study with district/school improvement goals
- Explains the potential impact on students and instructional practices
- Discusses possible broader relevance to other sites facing similar challenges

- Framed as a practical, iterative learning effort, not a definitive solution

🔹 5. Research Questions

- Includes clearly stated research questions
- Questions are framed within an Improvement Science context, such as:
  - Understanding variation
  - Exploring system-level barriers
  - Investigating how change ideas are tested and refined
- Avoids framing as hypothesis-testing or proving cause-effect

🔹 6. The System

- Includes a Systems Map identifying organizational structures, relationships, and forces at play
- Includes a Process Map of current workflows or routines connected to the problem
- Interprets how the system creates and sustains the current outcomes

🔹 7. Root Cause Analysis

- Includes a Fishbone Diagram with 3–5 root causes
- Uses 5 Whys technique to explore deeper causes
- Incorporates findings from Empathy Interviews with those closest to the problem
- Demonstrates a systems-thinking mindset, showing how deeper structures drive the surface problem
- Root cause analysis results in a Driver Diagram

🔹 8. Positionality

- Addresses **personal positionality**: identity, beliefs, and experiences related to the PoP
- Addresses **professional positionality**: current role, responsibilities, and influence on the system
- Reflects on how positionality may create bias or influence data
- Outlines strategies to mitigate bias and maintain objectivity

🔹 9. Evaluation Plan & Intervention Proposal (Temporary Placement)

- Describes a mixed-methods evaluation plan to examine the current system
- Outlines potential intervention ideas, connected to root cause findings
- Logic model may be included
- Makes clear that this will be moved to Chapter 3 or 4 later in the dissertation process

10. Limitations

- Identifies limitations related to:
  - Timeframe
  - Generalizability
  - Role-based bias (e.g., administrator-researcher dual role)
  - Data access or constraints
- Frames limitations through an Improvement Science lens:
  - Local learning, small tests of change, variation over generalization

11. Overall Quality of Writing

- Tone is formal, scholarly, and objective
- Sentences are clear and logically structured
- Transitions between sections are smooth
- Writing demonstrates doctoral-level synthesis and analysis
- APA style is followed consistently

12. Alignment with Improvement Science

- Dissertation uses Improvement Science vocabulary correctly
- All required tools are included and properly explained (PDSA, Fishbone, Pareto, etc.)
- Reflects iterative learning, not one-time intervention
- Cites foundational texts (e.g., Bryk et al., Perry et al.)

Appendix J: Chapter 2 – Literature Review Evaluation Rubric

EdD in School Improvement | Improvement Science–Aligned

Category	Score (1–3)	Detailed Feedback
1. Introduction and Framing of the Problem of Practice	1 – Needs Revision 2 – Adequate 3 – Exemplary	Does the chapter begin with a restatement of the Problem of Practice (PoP)? Is the literature aligned to the PoP, root causes, or system-level issues introduced in Chapter 1? Strong entries frame the literature around variation, systems-level levers, or potential change ideas.
2. Literature Review Methodology and Search Strategy	1 – Needs Revision 2 – Adequate 3 – Exemplary	Is there a clear explanation of how the literature was gathered? Are databases, keywords, inclusion/exclusion criteria, date ranges, and the balance of scholarly and practitioner sources described? Exemplary entries also justify scope and relevance.
3. Use of Improvement Science and Supporting Frameworks	1 – Needs Revision 2 – Adequate 3 – Exemplary	Improvement Science must be the primary lens. Score 3 includes references to IS principles and tools (e.g., driver diagrams, PDSA, variation). Supporting frameworks (e.g., Mastery Learning, Self-Determination Theory) are used effectively to deepen understanding of the PoP and potential change strategies.
4. Organization and Coherence	1 – Needs Revision 2 – Adequate 3 – Exemplary	Is the review logically structured (e.g., by theme, driver, or root cause)? Are transitions clear and sections cohesive? Exemplary reviews flow clearly and help the reader see the larger argument being built.
5. Quality and Depth of Literature	1 – Needs Revision 2 – Adequate 3 – Exemplary	Is the review comprehensive in scope and recent in coverage (5–10 years preferred)? Does it include foundational texts and current peer-reviewed studies relevant to school improvement and the PoP? Score 3 reflects a deep understanding of the field.
6. Relevance and Credibility of Sources	1 – Needs Revision 2 – Adequate 3 – Exemplary	Are sources appropriate to the problem context (e.g., secondary schools, U.S. K–12)? Does the student blend research and practitioner literature? Overreliance on outdated or non-scholarly sources results in a lower score.

Category	Score (1–3)	Detailed Feedback
7. Synthesis and Thematic Integration	1 – Needs Revision 2 – Adequate 3 – Exemplary	Does the student synthesize across studies to identify trends, tensions, or key insights? Are findings discussed comparatively? Exemplary reviews move beyond one-study-per-paragraph summaries and show integrative, critical thinking.
8. Alignment with Improvement Science	1 – Needs Revision 2 – Adequate 3 – Exemplary	Does the literature review use Improvement Science language (e.g., variation, testing change ideas, systems)? Are findings framed in terms of what could be tested or implemented using PDSA or other continuous improvement approaches?
9. Identification of Gaps and Change Ideas	1 – Needs Revision 2 – Adequate 3 – Exemplary	Are gaps in the literature clearly identified and linked to the study's direction? Are promising change ideas or interventions proposed based on the literature? Exemplary chapters articulate how the review informs future intervention design.
10. APA Style and Scholarly Writing	1 – Needs Revision 2 – Adequate 3 – Exemplary	Is the writing clear, concise, and formal? Are APA citations consistent and accurate? Are sections well-edited and professional in tone? Minor style issues are acceptable in a score of 3 if they do not detract from clarity or credibility.

Appendix K: Chapter 3 Checklist – Evaluation of the Problem of Practice

Improvement Science Dissertation of Practice | Mixed-Methods Evaluation Design

Purpose of Chapter 3

Chapter 3 presents the evaluation design and results related to a persistent educational problem. It defines the research design, outlines data collection and analysis methods, and offers system-level findings and recommendations to inform improvement.

Section-by-Section Checklist

1. Introduction

- Situates the chapter in the context of Improvement Science.
- Describes the evaluation's purpose and rationale.
- Connects to system analysis and PDSA cycles.

2. Evaluation Questions

- Lists focused evaluation questions (no formal hypotheses).
- Aligns questions to both process (implementation) and outcome (impact).
- Questions are suited to a mixed-methods design.

3. Target Population and Participants

- Describes site(s) and population involved.
- Outlines sampling strategy and justification.
- Includes demographics/context.
- Acknowledges sampling limitations.

4. Description of the Intervention

- Clearly explains the intervention or strategy under evaluation.
- Includes goals, timeline, key actors (e.g., leaders, teachers, NICs).
- Connects to Chapter 1 findings and system tools.

5. Research Methodology

- Justifies the use of mixed methods.
- Describes an embedded design (quantitative data within qualitative system inquiry).
- Cites research design literature (e.g., Creswell et al., 2018).

6. Research Design

- Describes data collection sequence and structure.
- Includes a visual of mixed-methods integration.
- Explains how findings will be triangulated.
- Clarifies that this is an evaluation—not an experiment.

7. Data Collection and Analysis

- **Improvement Science Tools:**

  - PDSA Cycles
  - Process Mapping, Fishbone Diagrams, Pareto Charts
  - Run Charts or Control Charts
  - Empathy Interviews (if applicable)

- **Qualitative Tools and Analysis:**

  - Interviews, focus groups, observations, documents
  - Collection protocols (e.g., interview guides)
  - Coding and thematic analysis methods
  - Software used (e.g., NVivo, MAXQDA)
  - Trustworthiness strategies described (e.g., member checking)

- **Quantitative Tools and Analysis:**

  - Describes datasets (e.g., test scores, attendance)
  - Survey instruments aligned to evaluation questions
  - Basic descriptive statistics (mean, SD, frequency)
  - Optional: Inferential statistics (t-tests, ANOVA)
  - Visuals (APA-style tables/charts/graphs)

8. Networked Improvement Community (NIC) Role

- Describes the NIC or collaborative inquiry group
- Details shared learning and analysis processes
- References NIC-developed tools (e.g., driver diagrams)

9. Evaluation Results

- Presents findings from qualitative and quantitative sources
- Organized by evaluation questions or themes
- Includes tables/figures as needed
- Connects findings to system analysis from Chapter 1

10. Recommendations

- Offers actionable system-level recommendations
- Each recommendation is tied to supporting data
- Prepares the foundation for a proposed intervention (Chapter 4)

11. Limitations

- Describes limitations: sample size, data access, researcher role
- Discusses bias mitigation (e.g., triangulation)

12. APA Style and Visual Presentation

- All visuals are APA formatted and referenced in-text
- Clear headings and scholarly writing maintained throughout

Appendix L: Chapter 4 Checklist – Implementation of the Recommended Intervention

Improvement Science Dissertation of Practice | With Design-Based Research (DBR) Integration

Purpose of Chapter 4

Chapter 4 documents the implementation and formative evaluation of an intervention that emerged from Chapter 3. This chapter integrates principles from both Improvement Science (e.g., PDSA cycles, systems thinking) and Design-Based Research (DBR) (e.g., iterative refinement, local theory development, practitioner collaboration).

Section-by-Section Checklist

1. Introduction

- States the chapter's focus on implementing the intervention derived from Chapter 3 findings
- Emphasizes dual framing: Improvement Science + DBR
- Reiterates the system-level problem addressed

2. Theoretical and Practical Foundations

- Summarizes recommendations from Chapter 3 that led to this intervention
- Connects the intervention to the Theory of Improvement
- Identifies research-based design principles
- Explains how DBR principles are operationalized:
    - Iterative testing
    - Contextual relevance
    - Collaborative development

3. Description of the Intervention

- Clearly describes intervention goals, components, timeline, and participants
- Includes visuals such as Logic Model, Revised Driver Diagram, or Implementation Framework
- Demonstrates alignment with systemic goals and equitable access (if relevant)

4. Implementation Design

- Describes the sequence and strategy for implementation (e.g., PDSA cycles, NIC involvement)
- Justifies pacing and structure of intervention delivery
- Connects to prior system findings from Chapters 1–3

5. Data Collection and Analysis Plan

- Identifies formative evaluation methods (qual + quant)
- Describes:
  - Surveys, assessments, logs (quantitative)
  - Interviews, reflections, observations (qualitative)
- Includes timeline for data collection and analysis at key intervention milestones
- Describes how data will inform iterative adaptation

6. Implementation Outcomes (Early Results)

- Presents initial results of intervention implementation
- Includes:
  - Fidelity or participation data
  - Early outcome indicators
  - Stakeholder feedback and perception data
- Visuals such as tables, charts, or excerpts support interpretation

7. Reflection and Adaptation

- Explains how findings were used to revise the intervention
- Demonstrates responsiveness and learning through DBR cycles
- Connects revised actions to Theory of Improvement

8. System Redesign Recommendations

- Offers broader system-level recommendations derived from intervention insights
- Topics may include:
  - Scaling the intervention
  - Revising staffing, supports, or processes
  - Policy alignment
- Grounded in findings and system analysis

9. Limitations

- Acknowledges:
  - Constraints in scope, time, or access
  - Contextual challenges that shaped implementation
- Reflects on how limitations influence generalizability

10. Figures, Tables, and APA Formatting

- All visuals are APA 7 compliant and referenced in the narrative
- Headings and subheadings follow APA formatting
- Writing is professional, objective, and analytical

Tools for Strengthening Chapter 4

- **Design Log**

  - Records how the intervention evolved
  - Includes:
    - Meeting notes
    - Key design decisions
    - Rationale and adaptation reflections

- **Intervention Journal Summary**

  - A reflective narrative or chart that summarizes the entire implementation journey
  - Tracks:
    - What was tried
    - What was learned
    - How the theory evolved

Appendix M: Chapter 5 Checklist – Findings, Discussion, and Recommendations

Improvement Science Dissertation of Practice | Final Analysis and Reflection Chapter

Purpose of Chapter 5

Chapter 5 synthesizes the key findings from evaluation and implementation cycles (Chapters 3 and 4), interprets what was learned about the system, reflects on the dissertation's contribution to practice and theory, and offers both scholarly and practitioner-oriented recommendations for continued improvement.

Section-by-Section Checklist

1. Introduction

- Restates the Problem of Practice and purpose of the intervention
- Reorients the reader to the structure and purpose of Chapter 5
- Connects to Theory of Improvement or Theory of Action

2. Summary of Key Findings

- Synthesizes results from Chapters 3 and 4
- Findings are organized by:
    - Evaluation questions
    - Change ideas or drivers
    - Themes across mixed data
- Optional: Use visual (table or chart) to highlight system-level insights

3. Discussion of Findings

- Interprets results in context of:
    - Root causes
    - System map
    - Implementation fidelity
- Connects learning to Improvement Science principles:
    - Variation
    - Iteration
    - Systems thinking
    - User-centered design
- Reflects on Theory of Improvement: confirmed, challenged, or revised

4. Contributions to Practice

- States what was learned about:
  - System operations
  - Change processes
  - Student/teacher improvement
- Highlights successful strategies or tools
- Optional: Visual showing process improvement or redesigned system

5. Recommendations

- **For Local Improvement:**

- Concrete, actionable steps the organization can take
- Based on findings and stakeholder feedback
- Aligned with next PDSA cycle

- **For Continued Research:**

- Suggestions to extend or deepen inquiry
- Options: scale-up, longitudinal, driver variation, comparative settings
- May connect to DBIR or other design-research models

- **For Policy or Leadership (Optional):**

- Recommendations for district/state leaders if relevant
- Topics: resource alignment, sustainability, strategic planning

6. Reflections and Learning

- Reflects on personal/professional growth
- Captures practitioner-researcher learning moments
- Revisits positionality: how perspective shifted
- May include NIC reflections, journal insights, or system leadership lessons

7. Limitations and Transferability

- Discusses scope-related limitations (access, time, data quality)
- Frames findings as system-specific but adaptable
- Emphasizes local learning and system variation

8. Final Conclusion

- Recaps dissertation arc
- Highlights major contributions to both scholarship and practice
- Ends with a call to action or systemic reflection

9. APA Formatting and Presentation

- APA 7th edition standards used consistently
- Tables and figures labeled and referenced
- Scholarly tone and polished narrative throughout

Appendix N: Modified Traditional Dissertation Format Checklists

For Students Conducting Evaluation-Only Dissertations Without Intervention Implementation

EdD in School Improvement | Improvement Science-Aligned
Requires Program Approval

Chapter 1 Checklist: Problem of Practice

Purpose: To introduce the Problem of Practice using the Improvement Science framework, define the context, explore the system, and propose an evaluation-based inquiry approach when implementation is not feasible.

✓ Title and Abstract

- Title reflects an Improvement Science focus
- Abstract summarizes the PoP, system context, evaluation purpose, and methodological approach

✓ Introduction to the Study

- Declares an Improvement Science Dissertation of Practice
- Introduces PDSA and continuous improvement mindset
- Frames the dissertation as diagnosis and evaluation

✓ Background of the Problem

- School/district context (demographics, trends)
- Connects to broader systemic trends
- Includes scholarly and practitioner literature

✓ Statement and Definition of the Problem

- Specific, persistent, student-centered PoP
- Multiple forms of evidence
- Includes visuals like a Pareto Chart

✓ Purpose and Significance

- Aligns with improvement goals
- Frames the study as iterative inquiry
- Avoids causal or definitive proof framing

✓ Research Questions

- Focused on system conditions, variation, or learning
- Avoids hypothesis testing

✓ System-Level Analysis

- Systems Map and Process Map included
- Interprets sustaining structures

✓ Root Cause Analysis

- Fishbone Diagram and 5 Whys
- References planned Empathy Interviews
- Driver Diagram derived from root causes

✓ Positionality

- Describes identity and professional context
- Reflects on potential bias
- Outlines bias mitigation strategies

✓ Evaluation Plan (Preview)

- Introduces mixed-methods evaluation design
- Logic Model optional
- Full detail to appear in Chapter 3

✓ Limitations

- Frames scope, access, and time issues in an Improvement Science lens

✓ APA and Writing Style

- APA 7th edition formatting
- Logical flow and scholarly tone

Chapter 2 Rubric: Literature Review

Remains unchanged for both formats — see Appendix J

Chapter 3 Checklist: Evaluation Methodology (No Intervention)

Purpose: To describe a rigorous, ethically sound evaluation design to explore the Problem of Practice without implementing an intervention.

1. **Introduction**
    - Reframes study as evaluation
    - Justifies site-based constraints
2. **Evaluation Questions**
    - System-oriented, not causal
    - Reflects Improvement Science principles
3. **Study Design and Rationale**
    - Mixed-methods, case study, or quantitative
    - Cites appropriate methods literature
4. **Setting and Participants**
    - Demographics and context
    - Access and ethical considerations
5. **Data Sources and Instruments**
    - Surveys, interviews, documents
    - Validity/reliability addressed
6. **Data Collection Procedures**
    - IRB and permissions included
    - Data security protocols outlined
7. **Data Analysis Plan**
    - Qual: Coding, trustworthiness, software
    - Quant: Stats, missing data, SPSS
    - Mixed: Integration strategy
8. **Ethical Considerations and Limitations**
    - Consent and anonymity
    - Role-based and access limitations
9. **APA Compliance and Visuals**
    - Tables and figures formatted
    - Writing clear and aligned with scholarly standards

Chapter 4 Checklist: Results of Evaluation (No Intervention)

Purpose: To report findings from an evaluation-only design, highlighting what was learned from analysis of the system.

1. **Introduction**
    - Restates purpose and methods
2. **Findings by Question or Theme**
    - Organized, integrated results
    - Includes charts, quotes, and joint displays
3. **Interpretation and Systems Insight**
    - Discusses what findings show about system structures
    - Connects to earlier tools (e.g., Driver Diagram)
4. **Triangulation and Integration**
    - Notes convergence/divergence of findings

5. **Limitations**
    - Site or data access constraints
    - Generalization cautioned
6. **APA and Presentation**
    - Figures cited and explained
    - Writing polished and scholarly

Chapter 5 Checklist: Discussion and Future Improvement (Evaluation-Only)

Purpose: To synthesize insights and propose next steps, including hypothetical improvement actions.

1. **Introduction**
    - Reiterates PoP and study scope
    - Frames Chapter 5 as reflective and developmental
2. **Summary of Key Findings**
    - Synthesis across sources
    - May include summary visuals
3. **Discussion and Interpretation**
    - Connects findings to systemic drivers
    - Reflects Improvement Science insights (variation, iteration)
4. **Recommendations**
    - **For Practice**: Site-based strategies
    - **For Research**: Ideas for future exploration
    - **For Hypothetical PDSA**: Suggests a next test of change
5. **Reflections and Leadership Growth**
    - Personal/professional insights
    - Revisits positionality
6. **Limitations and Transferability**
    - Acknowledges constraints
    - Frames findings as locally bounded but adaptable
7. **Final Conclusion**
    - Summarizes impact and next steps
    - Ends with a systems-aware call to action
8. **APA Style and Visuals**
    - Headings, citations, and tables conform to APA 7

Appendix O – Conducting Audits in Chapter 3 Evaluations

Purpose of Audits in Improvement Science Dissertations

In educational improvement research, **audits** are systematic assessments used to evaluate the current state of a system, program, curriculum, personnel practices, or equity conditions. They provide structured data that complements traditional qualitative and quantitative methods, especially when external or large-scale data are limited. Audits can strengthen Chapter 3 by:

- Offering **rigorous, structured evaluations** aligned to your Problem of Practice (PoP).
- Generating actionable insights into **gaps, misalignments, or inequities** within existing systems.
- Providing **baseline data** to inform intervention design in Chapter 4.

What is an Audit?

An audit in this context is:

- A **systematic review** of policies, practices, or materials.
- Conducted using a **validated framework or rubric** when available.
- Focused on identifying **strengths, weaknesses, and areas for improvement**.

Audits differ from general observations in their **comprehensive, criteria-based approach**. They are evaluative rather than exploratory.

Types of Audits Relevant to Problems of Practice

Depending on your PoP, consider the following audit types:

1. **Equity Audit**
    - Evaluates demographic representation, resource allocation, discipline disparities, staffing diversity, and inclusivity practices.
    - Commonly used frameworks: Skrla et al.'s Equity Audit Model, local district equity frameworks.
2. **Curriculum Audit**
    - Reviews alignment to state standards, vertical and horizontal coherence, cultural responsiveness, and rigor.
    - May use district frameworks or established protocols such as Fenwick English's Curriculum Management Audit approach.
3. **Discipline Audit**
    - Assesses patterns in referrals, suspensions, expulsions, and restorative practices.
    - Useful to identify disproportionalities or systemic biases.
4. **Personnel or Retention Audit**

    - Reviews staff turnover trends, exit interview themes, and distribution of experienced teachers across schools.
5. **Instructional Audit**
    - Evaluates instructional practices across classrooms for consistency with research-based pedagogies and identified district priorities.

Integrating Audits into Chapter 3

If your evaluation design requires structured analysis of existing systems but lacks robust external data, an audit can serve as:

- A **primary data source**, particularly for PoPs focused on curriculum quality, equity, or staffing.
- A **supplemental data source** triangulating with surveys, interviews, and observational data.

Steps for Conducting an Audit

1. **Define the Audit Purpose**
    - Align with your PoP, evaluation questions, and system drivers.
2. **Select or Adapt an Audit Tool**
    - Prefer validated tools used by districts or established in research.
    - If adapting or creating a tool, clearly document criteria, rubrics, and rationale.
3. **Secure Permissions**
    - Obtain site approval to review personnel records, student data, curriculum documents, or other protected information.
4. **Collect Data Systematically**
    - Follow consistent protocols to ensure validity and reliability.
5. **Analyze Findings**
    - Identify patterns, gaps, and actionable insights.
    - Present results with visuals (tables, bar charts, heat maps) where appropriate.
6. **Discuss Implications**
    - Connect findings to root causes and your Theory of Improvement.
    - Inform intervention design in Chapter 4.

Example Audit Integration

Problem of Practice: Low reading achievement among English learners
Audit: Curriculum audit reviewing inclusion of language supports, cultural relevance, and alignment with ELPS standards.
Use: Results highlight specific gaps in curriculum materials, informing the design of targeted instructional interventions.

Best Practices for Dissertation Audits

- **Use existing frameworks** to enhance credibility.
- **Document your process** thoroughly in Chapter 3 methodology.
- **Combine audits with stakeholder input** (e.g., empathy interviews) to contextualize findings.
- **Ensure ethical handling of sensitive data**, especially in personnel or equity audits.

Appendix P. University Academy: Improvement Science Demonstration Site

Overview

The University of Texas at Tyler University Academy (UA) serves as a **living laboratory and demonstration site for Improvement Science**. Established as a university-affiliated K-12 open-enrollment public charter school, UA operates across **rural, urban, and suburban campuses**, offering authentic contexts for research, intervention design, and evaluation. The Academy systematically integrates the **Plan-Do-Study-Act (PDSA) cycle** into curriculum, instructional practices, and administrative decision-making to drive continuous improvement.

Purpose in Dissertation Research

UA functions as a **research platform for EdD students and faculty** pursuing Improvement Science dissertations. Many students, particularly those unable to conduct studies within their employing districts, have conducted their evaluations and interventions at UA. This partnership:

- Provides authentic P-12 contexts aligned with Improvement Science frameworks.
- Allows testing and refinement of interventions grounded in real-world educational practice.
- Supports dissertation designs ranging from baseline evaluations to PDSA Cycle 2 interventions and DBR/DBIR studies.

Key Features of UA as a Demonstration Site

- **Embedded Improvement Science Framework.** Every operational level employs PDSA cycles for iterative refinement of practices.
- **Networked Improvement Communities (NICs).** Teachers, leaders, and researchers engage in collaborative problem-solving.
- **STEM-Focused Laboratory School.** Emphasis on Project-Based Learning (PBL), STEM career pathways, and dual credit ensures rich evaluation contexts.
- **Equity and Access.** As an open-enrollment public charter, UA admits students regardless of prior academic achievement, ensuring diverse participant pools for studies.
- **Professional Growth Integration.** UA staff benefit from tuition-free master's and EdD programs, creating a culture of continuous improvement and a pipeline of practitioner-researchers.

Examples of Improvement Science Projects Conducted at UA

The following **selected dissertations and studies** illustrate how UA has served as a platform for Improvement Science research:

1. **Response to Intervention (RTI) Implementation.** Evaluated tiered support structures using PDSA cycles, leading to significant gains in reading and math proficiency (Dennis, 2023).

2. **Blended Learning Models.** Examined personalized learning interventions in math and reading, demonstrating improved academic outcomes through adaptive software and differentiated instruction (Pedersen, 2023; Rasberry, 2023).
3. **Dual Credit Pathway Evaluation.** Studied alignment and impact of dual credit programs on college readiness and persistence, informing ongoing curriculum improvements (Fischer, 2023).
4. **TELPAS and Emergent Bilingual Supports.** Identified factors impeding English language proficiency growth and refined instruction for emergent bilingual students (De La Sierra, 2023).
5. **STEM Teacher Preparation (UTeach).** Investigated the impact of clinical placements in UA's STEM PBL environment on preservice teacher preparedness (Veazy, 2023).
6. **Literacy Improvement Initiatives.** Evaluated targeted reading interventions using PDSA cycles to increase proficiency across grade levels (Magro-Malo, 2023).
7. **Systemic STEM Pipeline Development.** Explored how integrated PBL and STEM pathways increase postsecondary STEM enrollment (Odell et al., 2024).
8. **Teacher Development and Continuous Improvement.** Preliminary research on UA's tuition-free graduate programs showed enhanced instructional effectiveness and teacher retention (Simmons et al., forthcoming).
9. **Comparative School Model Evaluation.** Analyzed outcomes of STEM academies versus traditional school models, providing insights for broader policy and practice (Kennedy, 2023).

Using UA for Dissertation Research

When utilizing UA as a research site:

- Coordinate with UA leadership and the School of Education to align research purposes with campus improvement priorities.
- Ensure adherence to IRB and site-specific protocols.
- Design studies that integrate Improvement Science tools such as **driver diagrams, process maps, fishbone diagrams, and PDSA cycles**.
- Prioritize interventions and evaluations that contribute to UA's continuous improvement goals.

Implications for Improvement Science Practice

UA demonstrates how **systemic, embedded Improvement Science approaches can transform educational environments**. Dissertation research conducted at UA not only advances doctoral candidates' scholarship but also directly contributes to sustainable improvements in teaching, learning, and organizational outcomes.

For further information about UA as an Improvement Science demonstration site, contact:

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