# School Self-Study Guide

Questions outlined below should be asked during a school self-study. Answers to these questions will help provide a basis for the reflection and analysis necessary to begin the process of school improvement. Acting without first asking these questions, and paying close attention to how the school staff answers them, risks implementing a process that will repeat past mistakes and fail to address real problems. Some of the major questions that need to be asked include:

_____ **Based on a review of the school's standing on state and district key performance indicators, are there any particular indicators that appear to point to the causes of the school's low academic performance?**

For example, in reviewing results on standardized reading tests, is there a particular pattern established that indicates a weakness in the overall reading program?

_____ **Have there been any recent demographic shifts that would help to account for the school's low academic performance?**

For example, has there been an increase of non-English-speaking students enrolled in the school, which could affect test scores?

_____ **Does the school have clear academic standards that are known to students and staff? Does the school have high expectations for all students? Does it have the core curriculum and programs in place that could help students meet the expectations? Does the school have well-designed assessments that can detect problems before students fall too far behind?**

For example: Are all teachers oriented to the district's core standards documents? Do teachers receive ongoing support in their implementation? Does the current curriculum reflect a well-planned sequence of courses? Which assessments are used to guide the improvement of instruction? Are they the appropriate ones?

_____ **What programs does the school offer to support low-achieving students? Are these programs effective?**

For example: Are these programs based on well-supported research? Are these programs effectively implemented, coordinated, monitored and assessed?

**_____ Does the school have well-defined and enforced standards of conduct?**

For example: Does the school have high levels of violence and classroom disruption? Are rules of conduct clear, understood by all students, and consistently enforced? What are the programs and procedures that help prevent student misbehavior? Are they adequate?

**_____ Has the school engaged in prior improvement efforts? To what end?**

For example: What accounted for the success or failure of previous efforts to improve the school's academic performance? What lessons were learned from these efforts?

**_____ Do school managers help promote academic excellence? Do they work to maintain an orderly and collegial atmosphere?**

For example: Have school-site administrators communicated a vision of high standards of conduct and achievement? Are there indicators—e.g., high rates of staff absenteeism, staff turnover, grievances, or disunity—that staff morale is low? Are there indicators—e.g., high levels of school violence and disruption, high rates of student absenteeism, and/or high dropout rates—that a school environment supportive of high standards has not been established? Do school-site administrators actively engage the instructional staff in efforts to improve the school? Does the school building reflect a school climate of indifference and neglect?

**_____ Do teachers and classroom paraprofessionals play an active decision-making role in efforts to achieve academic excellence?**

Are academic standards, curriculum, staff development and other professional issues part of the school-based decision-making process?

**_____ Does the school provide adequate opportunities for professional development? Does the school's personnel policy work to attract and retain a qualified and experienced teaching force?**

For example: Does professional development support high standards of conduct and achievement? Do teachers receive training in implementing effective, research-supported teaching techniques for improving the academic performance of "at risk" students? Are adequate time, opportunities, and resources provided to support collaboration among professional staff? Do the school and district actively work to recruit and retain the best-qualified teachers?

**_____ Does the school effectively engage parents and the community in efforts to achieve excellence in the school?**

For example: How are the school's expectations concerning academic achievement and conduct communicated to parents? Are the current procedures adequate? Are parents actively engaged in the life of the school?

_____ Are sufficient resources provided to the school to enable it to support high standards of conduct and achievement? Do the district and school provide adequate support for the effective implementation of district, state and federally mandated education programs?

For example: Are there sufficient financial resources provided to support a rigorous academic program; quality teaching, adminisrative, and support staff; sufficient and appropriate supplies, texts and materials? Is the school building well equipped and maintained?

_____ What are the main factors that have contributed to the school's lack of academic success? Describe and discuss ways in which these factors could be reduced or eliminated.

For example: If reading scores are low in an elementary school, and this is due in part to the poorly articulated reading instruction currently in place, perhaps the school could adopt a comprehensive, proven, research-based reading program. Or, if a middle school is experiencing violence and disruptions, perhaps a more rigorous and consistently enforced standard for student behavior and conduct could be introduced on a schoolwide basis.