PLAN Pilot Program Methods and Procedures for Qualitative Data Collection:
Initial Implementation Phase Study

September 2025.

Investigators: K. Schiller (PI) & K. C. Wilcox (Co-I), F. Durand (Co-I), A. Leo (Co-I), & K. Jarrard (Co-I).

Table of Contents

Overview of the Study

The purpose of NYSED's Performance-Based Learning and Assessment Networks ("PLAN") program, funded under the USDOE Competitive Grants for State Assessments (CGSA) program, is to explore how approaches to performance-based learning and assessment (PBLA) can be implemented in a diverse range of schools, as part of an assessment strategy that incorporates multiple measures.

The goal of the PLAN Pilot research study is to identify how best to support schools and educators in shifting their instructional and assessment practices, with the eventual aim of improved outcomes for students.

Overarching Research Questions were:

1. Under what conditions can performance-based assessment approaches be adapted and implemented in a diverse range of public middle schools, high schools, and districts?

2. In transitioning schools from a test-driven to a performance-driven system of instruction, what supports, and other factors appear most important to ensure positive student outcomes?
3. What are the transformational shifts (e.g., classroom-based assessments, classroom routines, and instructional practices) made by the pilot schools?
   a. What are the short- and mid-term outcomes (stakeholder awareness, understanding of and support for PBLA, and changes in professional practices) at the pilot schools?

Qualitative Component Purpose and Plan

Recognizing state-wide implementation of PBLA is an ambitious goal, the PLAN Pilot research team examined initial implementation efforts across a diverse set of Pilot schools from winter through summer 2025. The qualitative component of the study examined this early stage of implementation to glean insights into educator and leader experiences preparing to or starting to make the desired shifts in instruction and assessment.

The research team designed the educator focus groups and leader interviews to allow for analysis regarding the similarities and differences in experiences across schools related to instructional and assessment shifts, with attention to the conditions and support for educators making changes in their instructional and assessment practices.

Data Collection

Developed in consultation with NYSED's PLAN Program leaders, focus group and interview questions probed into opportunities and challenges to implementing PBLA in a school, as well as into the necessary conditions prior to and supports needed during PBLA implementation with integrity and sustainability.

Recruitment of PLAN Pilot schools included the use of consent procedures typical in human subjects' research.

1) Principals (and in some cases district leaders) were asked to provide consent for the school to be studied through University at Albany Qualtrics system.
2) District and school building leaders and teachers involved in initial implementation work were invited to participate in a 30–60-minute interview or focus group using University at Albany's Zoom Account

Participants were informed that, in addition to questions about conditions and support for implementing PBLA, focus groups and interviews would probe into specific transformational shifts guided by research question 3 (see focus group and interview protocols in Appendix A).

As an additional data source, documents were collected related to the PLAN Pilot from PLAN Pilot schools. These documents included exemplary lesson or unit plans and professional learning opportunities offered.

Finally, research teams used an interpretive memo protocol to record initial interpretations of data organized by research questions.

Table 1. Data collection timing, type, and participation.

PLAN Pilot School	Data Collected	# of interviews	# of focus groups	# of teachers	# of leaders	Total # of participants
Stanely G Falk	12/2024	3	1	3	3	6
OMH P-TECH	12/2024	1	2	2	3	5
Hendrick Hudson HS	1-3/2025	2	1	3	2	5
Wellsville Secondary	1-3/2025		2	3	3	6
Johnson City Senior HS	1/2025	1	2	4	3	7
Saugerties Senior HS	1-4/2025		2	2	3	5
Waverly HS	3-5/2025	2	1	2	2	4
Brookfield Central	4/2025		2	3	2	5
Port Chester Senior HS	4/2025		2	3	3	6
Brentwood HS	6/2025	4		2	2	4
Irondequoit HS	5-7/2025		2	2	3	5
Tupper Lake MS/HS	5-6/2025	1	1	2	1	3
Maryvale HS	6/2025	1	1	3	2	5
Dana West HS (Port Byron)	6-7/2025	1	1	1	2	3
Robert Moses MS	7/2025		2	3	3	6
Colton-Pierrepont Central	7/2025	1	1	6	1	7
Total	**12/2024-7/2025**	**17**	**23**	**44**	**38**	**82**

Data Security

Focus groups and interviews were conducted via the University at Albany's Zoom Account. Recordings were made using Zoom with consent from participants and kept on password-protected laptop computers in the possession of research staff and on the university server.

Data Sources

1) Focus group transcripts with PLAN Pilot Teachers

2) Interview transcripts with PLAN Pilot Leaders—who may include principals, superintendents, teacher-leaders, and PLAN Pilot Transition Leaders (a role that encompasses a variety of positions)

3) Documents

4) Researcher interpretive memos

Data Analysis

Data outlined above, and including interpretive memos crafted by the research team, were coded in phases beginning with a priori coding informed by the research questions and frameworks for promoting and monitoring instructional and assessment changes, including supportive dispositions and capabilities for instructional shifts (see Darling-Hammond, 2017; Wellberg & Evans, 2021). To both build from theory and empirical research and generate new insights, data were also coded using an inductive method. Coding was facilitated using NVivo (Lumivero, 2024) qualitative software (Miles et al., 2020). Appendix B contains the case study drafting procedures and the codebook showing both main-level (i.e., "parent) codes and sub-level (i.e., "child") codes.

For individual case study analysis, the research team coded for key themes separately for the two groups of participants, which reflects that the interview protocol questions differ:

1. PLAN Pilot teacher focus groups
2. Plan Pilot leader interviews

These case studies provided the foundation for the cross-case analysis, which was guided by three analytic lenses:

➢ First, what are the primary, often repeated issues/themes that emerged?
➢ Second, what are the role, content-area, grade-level, or focus-area issues that emerged?
➢ Third, what are the core concerns that can inform the next phase of PBLA implementation in NYS schools?

Using Miles et al. (2020) as a guide for the cross-case analysis, the research team used data matrices to identify common themes and outlier data.

Multiple methods to attend to credibility threats (Maxwell, 2013) were used including a) peer review/debrief of the data and process (through researcher interpretive memos and research team periodic and final case study debriefs), b) data, investigator, theory, methodological (i.e., source) triangulation, c) identifying negative cases (or disconfirming evidence) through the use of such tools as data matrices, d) clarifying bias (i.e., reflexivity) through researcher interpretive memos and debriefing, and e) member checking the accuracy of case study reports with superintendents and/or principals.

Confidentiality

With the permission of the principal, schools were identified by name. The principal was referenced by title with consent—all others were promised anonymity except if requested not to be. The confidentiality of all other participants was carefully maintained through the use of pseudonyms, and no data was collected or shared without written permission. Consent forms were used to obtain each participant's approval.

Sharing of Results

NYSED was provided with initial case study reports and the cross-case report for review, as specified in the MOU, prior to publication.

Appendix A: Focus Group & Interview Protocols

Leader Interview Protocol

Introductory Script

Hello, I'm _____ with the PLAN Pilot Study research team. I'd like to first thank you for taking time to help us with our study. I am going to ask you a series of questions and listen to your answers. This interview should take 30-60 minutes of your time.

Before we begin, I want to go over a few things about how the interview will be conducted.

- First, we would like to audio-record our discussion to make sure that we have accurately captured the information you are providing, but if you prefer that we not record that's OK too. Is it OK with you to record?
- If, at any time, you would like me to stop the recorder, please let me know. If you are ever reluctant to continue to participate in the interview, let me know that too. We will stop at any time you wish.
- Finally, in order to participate in this study, I need to make sure that you have signed the online consent form.

****

Interviewer:

School Name/Focus Area:

Participant(s) Name/Title:

Part A. Introductory/Background Questions

1) Please restate your name, how long you have been a leader at this school or if not a designated "leader" how long you have been in your current position at this school.
2) How would you describe your school?
   a. What is it like to work here? (Probes: relationships between teachers, with caregivers/community members, and staff)
3) Please tell me/us about the population of students served in this school.

Part B. Leadership Actions

1. What led you to become part of the PLAN Pilot?
    a. What are your goals associated with this work?
    b. How do you see your roles and responsibilities related to the PLAN Pilot work?

2. Please tell us about who is involved in PLAN Pilot work at your school.
    a. Who is on your team?
    b. How did they become involved?
3. How are you communicating with PBLA team members about the work?
    a. How are you creating space for the work around PBLA to happen? (Probes: Meetings- how often, when, who; setting aside time/resources, etc.)
4. Please share your thoughts about PBLA implementation as it relates to current or future state and federal accountability measures of your school.
    a. Please share your thoughts on PBLA implementation and teacher accountability measures (e.g., teacher performance assessments).

Part C. Instructional and Assessment Shifts

1. What does performance-based learning and assessment (PBLA) mean to you?
    a. What does it look like in a classroom?
    b. What do you see as the pros and cons to PBLA methods and strategies?
2. What instructional methods or strategies will you be looking for in classrooms due to your school participating in the PLAN Pilot, if any?
    a. Please share any examples of changes you have witnessed or know about. [If provided proceed to b]
    b. How well do you think these methods or strategies are working?
        i. Please provide examples of when PBLA methods or strategies have worked well. (Probes: any patterns you noted about for which students, or content, or other factors might be attributable to that outcome?)
        ii. Please provide examples of when PBLA methods or strategies have not worked as well (Probes: any patterns you noted about for which students, or content, or other factors might be attributable to that outcome?)
3. What PBLA methods or strategies are under consideration or in planning stages to try this year, if any?
    a. Please share what is being considered or planned.
    b. What do you hope will happen when this strategy or method is used?
    c. How will you assess how well PBLA implementation is going?

Part D. Supports and Other Factors
1. What resources are you making available in your school and/or district to support performance-based learning and assessment?
    a. Probes: planning time, professional learning, etc.
2. What resources are available outside your school and/or district to support performance-based learning and assessment?

      a. Probes: Technical Assistance Centers (TACs), mentor schools, Professional Learning Providers (PLPs), etc.

      b. To what extent have you engaged with the TACs, mentor schools, and/or other PLAN Pilot supports?

3. What are the opportunities or barriers to support performance-based learning and assessment in your school?

      a. What do you need more of to support you in integrating performance-based learning and assessment in your school?

      b. What do you need less of to support you in integrating performance-based learning and assessment in your school?

4. Do you have any documents (e.g., PLAN Pilot school implementation documents, PLAN-Pilot-related professional learning opportunities offered in your school) you would be willing and able to share?

5. Is there anything else you would like to share with me/us about your experience in the PLAN Pilot or integrating performance-based learning and assessment in your school?

Teacher Focus Group Protocol

Introductory Script

Hello, I'm _____ with the PLAN Pilot Study research team. I'd like to first thank you for taking time to help us with our study. I am going to ask you a series of questions and listen to your answers. This focus group should take 30-60 minutes of your time.

Before we begin, I want to go over a few things about how the interview will be conducted.

- First, we would like to audio record our discussion to make sure that we have accurately captured the information you are providing, but if you prefer that we not record that's OK too. Is it OK with you to record?
- If at any time, you would like me to stop the recorder, please let me know. If you are ever reluctant to continue to participate in the interview, let me know that too. We will stop at any time you wish.
- Finally, in order to participate in this study, I need to make sure that you have signed the online consent form.

****

Interviewer:

School Name/Focus Area:

Participant(s) Name/Title:

Part A. Introductory/Background Questions

1. Please re-state your name, how long you have been a teacher, what classes you teach and at what grade level.
2. How would you describe your school?
   Probe: What is it like to teach here? (Probes: relationships between teachers, with caregivers/community members, and leaders)

3. Please tell me/us about the population of students you serve here.
4. What led you to become part of the PLAN Pilot?
   a. Probes: Describe if you are a) already directly participating in PLAN, b) in a grade/subject targeted for early-stage implementation, or c) not yet identified to participate, but are planning to participate.

Part B. Instructional Shifts

1. What does performance-based learning mean to you?
    a. What does it look like in a classroom?
    b. What do you see as the pros and cons to performance-based instructional methods and strategies?
2. What instructional methods or strategies have you integrated in your teaching since becoming part of the PLAN Pilot, if any?
    a. Please share examples of instructional changes you have made. [If provided, proceed to b.]
    b. How well do you think these instructional methods or strategies are working?
        i. Please provide examples of when your performance-based instructional methods or strategies have worked well. (Probes: any patterns you noted about for which students, or content, or other factors might be attributable to that outcome?)
        ii. Please provide examples of when your performance-based instructional methods or strategies have not worked as well. (Probes: any patterns you noted about for which students, or content, or other factors might be attributable to that outcome?)
3. What performance-based instructional methods or strategies are you considering or planning to try this year, if any?
    a. Please share what you are considering or planning.
    b. What do you hope will happen when you try this method or strategy?

Part C. Assessment Shifts

1. What does performance-based assessment mean to you?
    a. What does it look like in a classroom?
    b. What do you see as the pros and cons to performance-based assessment methods and strategies?
2. What assessment methods or strategies have you integrated in your teaching since becoming part of the PLAN Pilot, if any?
    a. Please share examples of assessment changes you have made. [If provided, proceed to b.]
    b. How well do you think these assessment methods or strategies are working?
        i. Please provide examples of when your performance-based assessment methods or strategies have worked well. (Probes: any patterns you noted about for which students, or content, or other factors might be attributable to that outcome?)
        ii. Please provide examples of when your performance-based assessment methods or strategies have not worked as well (Probes: any patterns you noted about for which students, or content, or other factors might be attributable to that outcome?)

3. What performance-based assessment methods or strategies are you considering or planning to try this year, if any?
    a. Please share what you are planning.
    b. What do you hope will happen when you try this strategy or method?

Part D. Supports and Other Factors
1. What resources are available in your school and/or district to support performance-based learning and assessment?
    a. Probes: planning time, professional learning, etc.
2. What resources are available outside your school and/or district to support performance-based learning and assessment?
    a. Probes: Technical Assistance Centers (TACs), mentor schools, Professional Learning Providers (PLPs), etc.
3. What are the opportunities or barriers to support performance-based learning and assessment in your school?
    a. What do you need more of to support you in integrating performance-based learning and assessment in your classroom?
    b. What do you need less of to support you in integrating performance-based learning and assessment in your classroom?
4. Do you have any documents (e.g., PBLA-related lesson plans or assessments, PLAN-Pilot-related professional learning opportunities offered in your school) you would be willing and able to share?
5. Is there anything else you would like to share with me/us about your experience in the PLAN Pilot or integrating performance-based learning and assessment in your classroom?

Appendix B: PLAN Pilot case study analysis and writing process

All source files (transcripts from interviews and focus groups, and interpretive memos) were loaded into NVivo qualitative software. Source files were assigned with attributes using file classification and case classification features. All source files were coded (reviewing the code descriptions to maintain consistency). Once coding was complete, queries for code reports, including all "child" sub-codes and their related "parent" main codes, were generated by category: a. school context, b. challenges, c. supports and other factors, d. adaptations, e. outcomes, f. PBLA defined, implementation recommendations, implementation solutions.

Code reports were uploaded to CoPilot (AI) (Microsoft, 2024) with prompts such as those below to craft initial drafts of sections of the case study.

School context section:

CoPilot Prompt: Summarize in no more than 800 words <add doc> with exemplar quotes using the outline: School Context; Geographic location; Community/demographic description; Reasons for participating in the PLAN Pilot.

Challenges, supports, adaptations, outcomes, and PBLA defined/implementation recommendations and solutions sections (separately):

CoPilot Prompt: Summarize in no more than 1000 words with exemplar quotes and at least three headings <add document name>.

Copilot output was reviewed to remove any inaccuracies, and quote and documentary evidence were then integrated into the text where appropriate. The case study was reviewed by the entire team of researchers to engage credibility-enhancing strategies such as researcher triangulation as recommended in case study research (Yin, 2018). Last, each case study draft was shared with participants to engage member checking—another recommended process to enhance credibility in case study research (Yin, 2018). In most cases, participants accepted the case study draft while in a few cases requests were made to slightly rephrase quotes, eliminate quotes, or modify short segments of text to better represent participants' experiences. The research team made these changes and then finalized each case study before sharing with NYSED PLAN Pilot Program leaders.

Table 2. PLAN Pilot codebook

Name	Description
PBLA adaptations	PBLA adaptations include changes to classroom routines, practices, and assessments. This parent code is for adaptations - what it requires and how it is perceived- that do not fit into child codes.
Classroom assessments	Past, present, and future plans for PB assessment shifts. Assessment shifts include use of rubrics. Includes development of assessment shifts within modules or units of instruction and training of teachers in the use of PB assessment techniques.
Classroom instruction	Past, present, and future plans for PB instructional shifts. Includes development of instructional shifts within modules or units of instruction and training of teachers in the use of PB instructional techniques.
Classroom routines	Past, present, and future plans for PBLA routine shifts.
Extra-curriculars and out-of-classroom	PBLA in extra-curriculars and out-of-classroom learning opportunities.
PBLA benefits	Benefits, advantages of PBLA.
PBLA challenges	PBLA challenges, including at implementation and longer term. This parent code is about challenges that do not fit into child codes.
Ambiguity	Ambiguity related to what assessments will be acceptable. Lack of clarity about the future overall. Reactions to ambiguity (such as fear) coded in other child codes.
Fear of unknown or change	Challenges related to fear of the unknown regarding PBLA and state assessments. Also challenges related to fear of change in general that PBLA represents.
Mismatch to college requirements	Challenge of potential for mismatch of PBLA with college requirements. For instance, college coursework that requires traditional tests vs. PBA.
Reliable and valid scoring	Challenges related to creating reliable and valid assessments.
Space	Spaces for PBLA to be facilitated - including libraries and other spaces as programs grow.
Time	Challenges related to time needed for PBLA learning opportunities, time needed for planning instruction and assessments, testing, and refining.

Name	Description
Variability in teacher learning needs	Challenges related to variable teacher learning needs. Includes variability by content area, students served, teaching experience, and teaching styles and affinities.
Will to replace existing practices	Challenges related to will or motivation to shift existing practices.
PBLA defined	What is understood as PBLA.
PBLA implementation recommendations	Recommendations for PBLA implementation. Includes suggested content and frequency of communications and professional learning opportunities offered.
PBLA implementation solutions	PBLA implementation solutions. These include scheduling changes to facilitate meeting and PD time for teachers.
PBLA supports and other factors	PBLA supports and other factors important to ensure transformations in classroom instruction and assessment. This parent code is for supports and other factors that do not fit into child codes.
Community and industry partners	PBLA work supported by community organizations and/or industry partners.
Coteaching and teacher teaming	Supports provided through co-teaching arrangements and teacher teaming arrangements. Includes PLCs (professional learning communities) focused on PBLA.
Local professional learning opportunities	School-based or local network-based professional learning. This includes common planning time for teachers.
Mentor schools	Supports or resources offered by mentor schools. Includes material resources, technical guidance, and motivational support.
Multiple pathways and timelines available	Supports for PBLA implementation relating to the school's offerings of multiple pathways to graduation and college degrees. Includes flexibility of timelines available for pursuing these pathways.
Pre-existing practices	Pre-existing (before PLAN Pilot) practices conducive to PBLA. May include alternative assessments, PB modules, activities, and classes.
Professional learning providers (TACs)	Supports and resources offered by professional learning providers - including Technical Assistance Centers (TACs). Includes the value of these supports and the types of supports utilized.

Name	Description
State policy and frameworks	E.g., Portrait of a Graduate, performance indicators in standards.
State-wide gathering PD	Supports and resources offered via state-wide gatherings.
Student participation in shift	Informing students of PBLA shifts and inviting them into the process of experimentation.
Technology	Technologies such as AI and library software to support PBLA.
PLAN PILOT outcomes	Intended short-term outcomes (stakeholder awareness, understanding of and support for PBLA, and changes in professional practices) and long-term (student) outcomes of PLAN Pilot. This parent code is for intended outcomes that do not fit into child codes.
Changes in professional learning opportunities	Changes in professional learning opportunities due to PLAN Pilot. Examples include dedicated teacher meeting times, dedicated professional learning communities in schools, dedicated professional development workshops, etc.
Resources needed	Resources needed to achieve PLAN Pilot outcomes. Examples include curriculum materials, technologies, physical spaces.
Stakeholder awareness	Stakeholder awareness needed to achieve PLAN Pilot outcomes. Strategies to increase stakeholder awareness include surveys, observations, and other multi-way communications
School context	Influences and important characteristics of school context impacting PBLA implementation. Demographic served. School goals related to PBLA.
Communications	School-based communications about PBLA. Includes the content and frequency of communications as well as who is communicating with whom.
Culture of school	Norms, values, and beliefs that make up the school culture. Data related to "how we do things and this is why" in this school. Examples include collaborations.
Goals related to PBLA	Goals related to PBLA. These include creating opportunities from interdisciplinary work.
Pilot team	Who is on the Pilot team and why.
Individual roles	What responsibilities and roles Pilot team members hold. How these responsibilities and roles were determined.

Name	Description
Reasons for participating in Pilot	Reasons for participating in PLAN Pilot. Includes who championed participation and why.

References:

Darling-Hammond, L. (2017). *Developing and measuring higher order skills: Models for state performance assessment systems.* https://learningpolicyinstitute.org/sites/default/files/product-files/Models_State_Performance_Assessment_Systems_REPORT.pdf

Lumivero. (2024). *NVivo* (Version 15) [Computer software]. https://lumivero.com/products/nvivo/

Maxwell, J. A. (2013). *Qualitative research design: An interactive approach* (3rd ed.). SAGE Publications.

Microsoft. (2024). *Microsoft Copilot* [Large language model]. https://copilot.microsoft.com/

Miles, M. B., Huberman, A. M., & Saldaña, J. (2020). *Qualitative data analysis: A methods sourcebook* (4th ed.). SAGE Publications.

Stosich, E. L., Snyder, J., & Wilczak, K. (2018). How do states integrate performance assessment in their systems of assessment? *Education Policy Analysis Archives*, *26*(13), n13.

Wellberg, S. & Evans, C. "Enhancing the impact of performance assessments on instruction: A research-based framework monitoring the use of performance assessments to promote positive instructional change." The National Center for the Improvement of Educational Assessment, Inc. (2021, August 11). https://www.nciea.org/blog/enhancing-the-impact-of-performance-assessments-on-instruction/

Yin, R. K. (2018). *Case study research and applications: Design and methods* (6th ed.). SAGE Publications.