



Nine Characteristics of High-Performing Schools

***A research-based resource for schools and districts
to assist with improving student learning***



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State Superintendent of Public Instruction

Second Edition
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Nine Characteristics of High-Performing Schools

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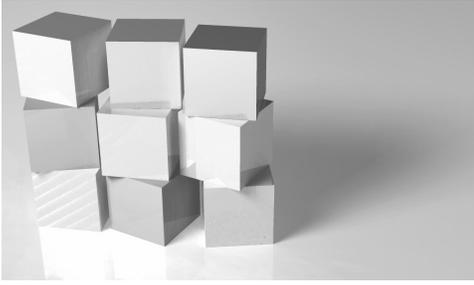
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Executive summary

Successful schools *do* exist.

Despite reports of achievement gaps and low test scores, many schools have shown sustained progress in educating children. How are they doing it? And do similarities exist among those schools?

In 2002, Washington state school improvement specialists from the Office of Superintendent of Public Instruction (OSPI) reviewed more than 20 studies to answer those questions. The studies – most of which looked at elementary schools – focused on schools with students who achieved at higher levels than their demographic characteristics would predict.

From the studies, OSPI researchers distilled nine characteristics that were found most often in high-performing schools:

1. A clear and shared focus
2. High standards and expectations for all students
3. Effective school leadership
4. High levels of collaboration and communication
5. Curriculum, instruction and assessments aligned with state standards
6. Frequent monitoring of learning and teaching
7. Focused professional development
8. A supportive learning environment
9. High levels of family and community involvement

No single characteristic led to school success. Most studies identified five or more of the traits. Research found that reaching that level takes years of sustained school commitment, affecting values, attitudes, beliefs, and instructional practices. cursory attention to the nine characteristics will yield superficial changes, but not lasting success.

Using these results, OSPI published the first edition of “Nine Characteristics of High-Performing Schools” in January 2003.

Second edition

Since publication of the first edition, the characteristics have become a framework for school improvement in Washington. Also, more research has been done on high-performing schools and improving student learning. With that in mind, in 2006 OSPI asked a number of experts to review the original document. Their comments and suggestions helped shape the second edition of “Nine Characteristics.”

In essence, reviewers confirmed the validity of the nine characteristics. They noted that, for continuity, the original characteristics and definitions should remain. But additional ideas and suggestions for implementation were identified from research and professional literature. These concepts, discussed throughout this document, include:

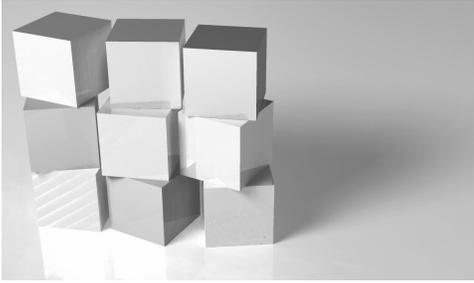
- A. Effective processes for improving schools
- B. Expanded perspectives on effective leadership
- C. Relational trust (i.e., trusting relationships among persons in an organization)
- D. Quality instruction, grading practices, and monitoring
- E. Professional learning communities
- F. Cultural competence and culturally responsive teaching
- G. Family and community engagement in schools
- H. High school improvement
- I. District improvement
- J. Need-based allocation of resources (funding, staffing, and support)

Each concept expands and deepens our understanding of the characteristics. Some relate specifically to individual characteristics; others relate to several characteristics and are discussed in multiple sections. The new concepts suggest additional ideas and avenues for improving schools and learning. For example, the discussion of curriculum, instruction, and assessment, in particular, provides more information to help improve learning and teaching.

The second edition also focuses on how the nine characteristics are interrelated and suggests a continuous cycle of action that systematically attends to all nine. Seminal research on effective schools is included, as well as about 120 new references and relevant OSPI documents.

The overall purpose of the document is to help schools successfully implement their school improvement efforts – to get beyond making plans to taking action. School Improvement Perception surveys – included in Appendix B – can be used to gather information from staff, students, and communities to help gauge their school improvement progress.

Since the 1993 passage of House Bill 1209, we have learned a great deal about educational reform. Improvements have been made. The challenge remains to marshal the political will and necessary resources to complete the job—to help all students reach the high standards that we have set for them.



Introduction to the Second Edition

Becoming a high-performing school takes years of sustained commitment. There is no single thing a school can do to ensure high student performance. Researchers have found that high-performing schools have a number of characteristics in common (Edmonds, 1979; Lezotte, 1991). The professional and research literature have identified various characteristics of improving and effective schools. Educational reformers and theorists have developed programs and processes for assisting school practitioners in creating and maintaining those conditions to help increase student learning.

In 2002, Office of Superintendent of Public Instruction (OSPI) research staff identified and reviewed more than 20 recent studies that focused on schools in which students were achieving at greater levels than would be predicted based on their demographic characteristics. Some of the studies reviewed other research on the same topic, while others examined high-performing schools in specific settings and locations with specific student demographics. This body of research includes findings from both Washington state and around the nation. The bibliography of the research reports and a matrix summarizing the findings are included in this document (Appendix A, p. 118).

Each study was analyzed to determine which characteristics were found most often among high-performing schools. Performance was usually measured in terms of high or dramatically improving scores on standardized tests, often in spite of difficult circumstances such as high levels of poverty. In every case, there was no single factor that accounted for the success or improvement. Instead, the research found that high-performing schools tend to have a combination of common characteristics. Most studies found five or more characteristics; some found as many as eight or nine. Studies often focused on elementary schools. However, the characteristics apply equally to secondary schools (e.g., Henchey, Dunnigan, Gardner, Lessard, Muhtadi, Raham, & Violato, 2001).

OSPI's analysis narrowed these lists into nine areas. These schools have

1. A clear and shared focus
2. High standards and expectations for all students
3. Effective school leadership

4. High levels of collaboration and communication
5. Curriculum, instruction and assessments aligned with state standards
6. Frequent monitoring of learning and teaching
7. Focused professional development
8. A supportive learning environment
9. High levels of family and community involvement

The nine characteristics are not listed in any priority order, although an internal logic emerges. Students and their learning, with an emphasis on ALL students, are central to the practices of school improvement. In Figure 1, a Venn diagram is used to depict the interrelated nature of the nine characteristics. The nine characteristics have been “chunked” into three broad categories: goals and aspirations, processes and actions, and supports and capacity building. The **goals** of school improvement are captured in *clear and shared focus* and *high standards and expectations for all students*. **Processes** to attain the goals of all students learning to high standards include *high levels of collaboration and communication*; *curriculum, instruction, and assessments aligned with state standards*; and *frequent monitoring of learning and teaching*. **Supports** are comprised of the characteristics *focused professional development*, *a supportive learning environment* and *high levels of family and community involvement*. **Effective school leadership**, listed as one of the characteristics, is instrumental in the implementation of all other characteristics, and therefore, surrounds the Venn diagram. The local community, district, state, and ultimately national interests, provide the **external context** for school improvement and influence the work of educators. Some of the characteristics are a means as well as ends for achieving high performance. Effective collaboration and communication, for example, are crucial in developing and maintaining a well-organized, high-performing institution.

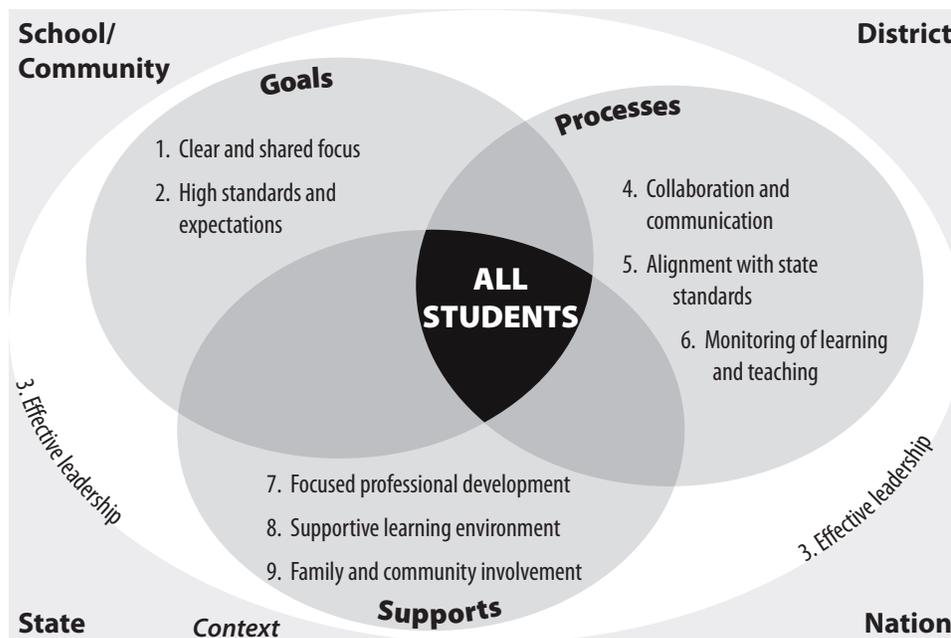


Figure 1: Interrelationships of the Nine Characteristics

Need for a Second Edition

Since the original publication, the nine characteristics of high-performing schools have become a widely-used framework for school improvement in Washington. Experiences in schools and among school leaders have reinforced the appropriateness of all nine characteristics and their basic definitions. The original research base has not changed. Research conducted by the Center for Educational Effectiveness (CEE) for OSPI and more than 400 Washington schools supports the use of the nine characteristics as a “rigorous framework for staff to view attributes which research has shown have a positive impact on student learning and achievement.” The framework provides “common language and consistent practice” to assist staff in “focusing their school improvement conversations around a solid research basis” (Lobdell, 2007).¹

Researchers continue to examine educational reform programs and processes. School improvement practices have evolved to deepen understanding of effective processes and to enhance change efforts. Also OSPI, with Washington educators, has developed several new documents to use in improving student learning and assisting teacher practice. Thus, the original report issued in 2003 needed to be updated.

The Review Process

This new edition is a result of input from a number of reviewers. Practitioners in schools and districts in Washington, as well as other educators and policy makers, were invited to critique the original resource document and indicate what has been most useful, what should be revised or eliminated, what implementation suggestions were missing, and what additional resources should be added.

The responses from these individuals helped shape the new edition. Responders were generally positive about the original document and its usefulness. Suggestions for improving the resource have been incorporated throughout the revised document. About 120 new references have been reviewed and added to this edition.

Reviewers confirmed the terms used for the characteristics are solid, although some researchers and educational experts may use different terminology. The reviewers also affirmed that the original definitions of the characteristics should be maintained. Maintaining the definitions provides continuity for schools and districts engaged in school improvement. This introduction highlights some topics that are developed later in the revised document.

Going Deeper through Added Concepts and Research

Researchers and education reformers have deepened and expanded our thinking regarding the nine characteristics. This revised edition expands a number of concepts that were discussed briefly, or were not included, in the first edition. These concepts include:

¹ Personal conversation; see also <http://www.effectiveness.org>.

- A. Effective processes for improving schools
- B. Expanded perspectives on effective leadership
- C. Relational trust (i.e., trusting relationships among persons in an organization)
- D. Quality instruction, grading practices, and monitoring
- E. Professional learning communities
- F. Cultural competence and culturally responsive teaching
- G. Family and community engagement in schools
- H. High school improvement
- I. District improvement
- J. Need-based allocation of resources (funding, staffing, and support)

A. **Effective processes for improving schools** are identified by researchers. Seminal research on effective schools, conducted in the 1970s and 1980s, informed the original development of the nine characteristics but was not explicitly discussed in the first resource guide. After the initial review that generated these characteristics, subsequent studies on improving schools were used to confirm the nine characteristics. (See Appendix A, p. 118, for a list of these studies.)

Veteran school reformers will recognize the similarities between the nine characteristics and the correlates of effective schools identified and researched by Ron Edmonds, Larry Lezotte, Wilbur Brookover, and others. These researchers identified common characteristics among schools that were increasing student achievement regardless of socioeconomic status or family background. The correlates are often listed as (1) clear school mission, (2) high expectations for success, (3) instructional leadership, (4) frequent monitoring of student progress, (5) opportunity to learn and student time on task, (6) safe and orderly environment, and (7) home-school relations.

Many studies and school leaders recognize the importance of **data collection and analysis** in school improvement efforts. Although data is not a separate characteristic, it is implicit within several aspects of improvement processes, particularly for determining a focus or setting goals, monitoring learning to adjust instruction, monitoring the improvement plan, and, of course, for accountability purposes.

A number of new resources that reinforce many of the nine characteristics are available to support school improvement efforts.

- *Failure is Not an Option* describes six principles that are similar to the nine characteristics and which Blankstein (2004) states are foundational to building professional learning community with relational trust. The principles include common mission, vision, values, and goals, ensuring achievement for all students, collaborative teaming, using data, actively engaging family and community, and building sustainable leadership capacity.
- *Getting to Excellent: How to Create Better Schools* identifies characteristics of more effective schools, such as high expectations, challenging curriculum,

enriched teaching and learning with “minds on” engagement, professional development, and involvement of parents and community (Langer, 2004).

- *Change Leadership: A Practical Guide to Transforming Our Schools* develops an approach for “re-framing the school change problem” using seven disciplines for improving instruction by diagnosing competencies, conditions, context, and culture in a school. Several of the “disciplines” include components found in the nine characteristics, although some have different labels, e.g., shared vision of good teaching and student results, use of data for diagnostic purposes, professional development, and accountable collaboration (Wagner, Kegan, Lahey, Lemons, Garnier, Helsing, Howell, & Rasmussen, 2006).
- *The Learning Leader* suggests using leadership “maps” to focus leadership on effective practices to improve student learning and offers scoring guides to “audit” school improvement processes around comprehensive needs, inquiry process, goals, design, and evaluation (Reeves, 2006).
- *What Works in Schools: Translating Research into Action* identifies school-level factors impacting student learning. These are “guaranteed and viable curriculum, challenging goals and effective feedback, parent and community involvement, safe and orderly environment, and collegiality and professionalism” (Marzano, 2003, p. 15). The resource also discusses teacher and student factors and offers guidance for implementing the concepts identified by the author.
- Washington’s *School Improvement Planning Process Guide* (2005)² provides a cycle for renewing schools through evaluation of readiness to change, data analysis, study of research, development and implementation of action plans, and reflection. The guide provides tools to help with planning and implementation of improvement efforts. The *School System Improvement Resource Guide* (2005),³ a school district tool, was developed in collaboration with Washington Association of School Administrators (WASA), OSPI, educational service districts, and school districts.

Recent resources produced by OSPI provide assistance to schools and districts for improving teaching and learning for all students. These resources, available on the website,⁴ include

- *Grade Level Expectations; On-Line Grade Level Resources*
- *Washington State Guidance for Selection of Instructional Materials to Meet District and State Standards* (2007)
- *Washington State Professional Development Planning Guide IN ACTION: Linking Professional Development to Improved Student Learning* (2005)
- *Washington State K-12 Reading Model Implementation Guide* (2005)
- *Response to Intervention (RTI) Manual: Using Response to Intervention (RTI) for Washington’s Students* (2006)
- *Washington State Transitional Bilingual Instructional Program Guidelines* (2007)

² <http://www.k12.wa.us/SchoolImprovement/sipguide.aspx>

³ <http://www.k12.wa.us/DistrictImprovement/SSIRG> and www.wasa-oly/ssirg/

⁴ <http://www.k12.wa.us>

- *Washington State English Language Development Instructional Materials Review* (2005)
- *English Language Development (ELD) Content Standards*

B. Expanded perspectives of effective leadership can be gained from recent research studies and reports. Research on distributed leadership, sustained leadership, and lateral capacity building deepen understanding of educational leadership. Elmore (2000), Spillane (2006), Hargreaves and Fink (2006), and Fullan (2005, 2006) expand the concepts of leadership related to school improvement. Marzano, Waters, and McNulty (2005) identify leadership qualities that are positively linked to student learning. Through their meta-analysis of research, Waters and Marzano (2006) concluded that effective district-level leadership affects student achievement. These concepts are described more fully in “Effective school leadership” beginning on page 43. Short descriptions are included below:

- **Distributive leadership** acknowledges and promotes leadership among members of the organization. This concept moves beyond identifying heroic leaders to noting leadership functions that may be assumed or assigned to teacher leaders and those in other roles in districts and schools (Elmore, 2000; Hargreaves and Fink, 2006; Spillane, 2006).
- **Sustained school change** and improvement require on-going effort; this includes planning for turnover and succession in leadership. Hargreaves and Fink contend that sustainable leadership puts student “learning at the center of everything leaders do” (p. 27).
- **Lateral leadership capacity building** emphasizes the need for paying attention to and providing support across schools and districts to “scale up” school reform. Fullan (2006), Hargreaves, and Fink caution that one school cannot succeed at the expense of another when the ultimate goal is to improve learning for all students. Therefore, leaders are urged to learn from one another and to work together to improve schools.
- **Leadership attributes** are linked to student learning. In other recent research, Marzano, Waters, and McNulty (2005) identify 21 leadership attributes they found to have positive effects on student learning. Of these attributes, seven in particular are linked to promoting second-order change. Second-order change requires changes in attitudes, beliefs, and values that are more likely to affect student learning, in contrast to first-order change that is more often related to structural or organizational changes that may not affect student learning. The seven attributes are listed on pages 47-48.
- **District-level leadership** matters. In a meta-analysis of research studies, Waters and Marzano (2006) found a positive relationship between district leadership and student achievement. Five responsibilities of superintendents were particularly associated with student achievement. They all related to setting direction and maintaining a focus on teaching and learning. They also found that superintendent tenure is positively correlated with student achievement. The five responsibilities are listed on page 48.

C. Relational trust is an essential resource for school improvement according to research. Hargreaves and Fink (2006) assert that “trust is an indispensable resource for improvement” (p. 212), the “social glue” necessary to develop school-based professional community (p. 123). In a set of schools they studied, Bryk and Schneider (2002) found that the quality of social relationships had a “powerful role” in successful school improvement efforts. Tschannen-Moran (2004) identified the facets of trust as benevolence, honesty, openness, reliability, and competence. The facets affect relationships across student, staff, and family groups. Trust as a critical element, therefore, must pervade the implementation of all nine characteristics throughout the cycle of school improvement. Educators should also be aware of obstacles to relational trust that may occur in organizations and work to surmount them. Relational trust is discussed more fully on page 45.

D. Quality instruction, grading practices, and monitoring are essential components for improving student learning. The alignment of the curriculum, instruction, and assessment or the planned, actual (taught), and tested curriculum is fundamental. The impact of deeply aligning the content, context, and cognitive demand of the curriculum, instruction, and assessment cannot be overstated. While the deep alignment between what is taught and tested with the state standards is critical, effective instruction is key to reaching the state standards and, therefore, has the greatest influence on achievement. Thus, attributes of and approaches to effective instruction receive expanded and deeper attention in this revised resource. Topics include, among others, Response to Intervention, English language development content standards, authentic pedagogy, adaptive pedagogy, and culturally responsive instruction. Frequent monitoring of learning and teaching, using multiple forms of data to diagnose student learning, increases student learning. Also, grading practices in a standards-based system are discussed. Research and professional sources related to these topics are added to “Curriculum, instruction, and assessment aligned with state standards” on page 63 and “Frequent monitoring of learning and teaching” on page 86.

E. Professional learning communities offer a positive approach to advancing school improvement. Research on collaborative work cultures and the effects on student learning have been reported since the 1980s. “If there is anything that the research community agrees on, it is this: The right kind of continuous, structured teacher collaboration improves the quality of teaching and pays big, often immediate, dividends in student learning and professional morale in virtually any setting” (Schmoker, 2005, p. xii).

Little’s research (1990) emphasized the importance of teachers doing authentic joint work, focused on explicit common learning goals, which lead to increased teacher confidence, to more successful instructional solutions, and to gains in student achievement. Rosenholtz (1989) found teachers were more confident of their abilities when their teaching environments were collaborative. Fullan (2005) writes about the “daily habit of *working together*... [that] you learn by doing it and getting better at it on purpose” (p. 69). McLaughlin and Talbert (2006) report that rather than the charismatic, great leader it was principals who empowered and supported teacher lead-

ership to improve teaching practice that were most effective. *On Common Ground*, a collection of essays edited by DuFour, Eaker, and DuFour (2005), contains the endorsement of researchers and educational experts that believe professional learning communities offer the best hope for increasing student learning. This concept is treated in “High levels of collaboration and communication” (page 54) and “Focused professional development” (page 96).

F. Cultural competence and culturally responsive teaching are critically important to eliminate the academic achievement gap and increase learning for all students. Cultural competence, a concept borrowed from the health and human services areas, is increasingly discussed in educational circles. A definition of cultural competence in education seems to be still evolving. Certainly descriptors such as awareness, respect, sensitivity, understanding, and empathy are pertinent; however, the essence of cultural competence appears in its impact on actions within classrooms and schools. According to the Center for Effective Collaboration and Practice, cultural competence is defined as the attitudes, policies, and actions that allow professionals to work effectively in cross-cultural situations. “Operationally defined, cultural competence is the integration and transformation of knowledge about individuals and groups of people into specific standards, policies, practices, and attitudes used in appropriate cultural settings to increase the quality of services; thereby producing better outcomes.”⁵

King, Sims, and Osher (no date) identify “five essential elements that contribute to a system’s ability to become more culturally competent. The system should (1) value diversity, (2) have the capacity for cultural self-assessment, (3) be conscious of the ‘dynamics’ inherent when cultures interact, (4) institutionalize cultural knowledge, and (5) develop adaptations to service delivery reflecting an understanding of diversity between and within cultures. Further, these five elements must be manifested in every level of the service delivery system. They should be reflected in attitudes, structures, policies, and services” (retrieved 12/1/2006, p. 3).

The National Center for Cultural Competence (2002) has developed organizational assessment instruments and processes that may help schools and districts in examining their level of competence. Through self-assessments, organizations may increase their capacity to

- “gauge the degree to which they are effectively addressing the needs and preferences of culturally and linguistically diverse groups
- establish partnerships that will meaningfully involve families/ consumers and key community stakeholders
- improve family/ consumer access to and utilization of services and enabling supports
- increase family/ consumer satisfaction with services received
- strategically plan for the systematic incorporation of culturally and linguistically competent policies, structures and practices

5 http://cecp.air.org/cultural/Q_integrated.htm retrieved 12/1/2006

- allocate personnel and fiscal resources to enhance the delivery of services and enabling supports that are culturally and linguistically competent
- determine individual and collective strengths and areas for growth” (Goode, Jones, & Mason, p. 1-2).

Cultural competence and culturally responsive teaching must be embedded in the implementation of the nine characteristics through the school and district. Educators need “to examine their own cultural assumptions to understand how these shape their starting points for practice. They also need to know how to inquire into the backgrounds of their students so that they can connect what they learn to their instructional decision making...” (Banks, Cochran-Smith, Moll, Richert, Zeichner, LePage, Darling-Hammond, Duffy, with McDonald, 2005, p. 243).

Geneva Gay, Johnnie McKinley, William Demmert, Anne T. Lockwood, Walter Secada, and other researchers have identified teaching and learning strategies that serve all students well, including students of color and those living in poverty. Selected examples appear in this resource in “Curriculum, instruction, and assessment aligned with state standards” on page 77. Also, Gay’s work on culturally responsive teaching and Darling-Hammond’s suggested practices for adaptive pedagogy are cited. These concepts and suggestions potentially can increase learning for all students. *Addressing the Achievement Gap: A Challenge for Washington Educators*,⁶ an OSPI report, provides additional information.

G. Family and community engagement in schools is associated with increased student achievement. Research shows that family and community involvement can improve student learning, and many authors provide ideas and tools to help schools implement effective practices. Traditional family involvement activities do not necessarily engage parents sufficiently in their children’s learning. Langer (2004) writes, “(S)ubstantive parent and community involvement is usual in almost all schools that work well” (p. 55). Some authors suggest that schools are more successful when they involve families and communities in “authentic partnerships” (George, McEwin, & Jenkins, 2000, p. 292). Creating authentic partnerships is a second order change, which requires changing attitudes and beliefs regarding the role of families and communities in school improvement. The Washington Office of Superintendent of Public Instruction promotes a vision of families, schools, and communities working together in authentic partnerships to support the achievement of all students. This topic is discussed in “High levels of family and community involvement” on page 119.

H. High school improvement is now a frequent topic in conversations about educational reform. The research on effective schools generally did not feature high schools. The early research and reform efforts focused on elementary schools, perhaps because they are smaller and seem easier to affect by improvement strategies. Also, improving student performance at the elementary is often assumed to increase

6 <http://www.k12.wa.us/research/default.aspx>

a student's capacity to perform well at secondary levels and, therefore, a logical starting point for education reform. However, the nine characteristics of high-performing schools apply to secondary schools as appropriately as to elementary and middle schools.

High schools are complex organizations. They are often large and bureaucratic in order to manage large numbers of students and staff, and, consequently, many are impersonal. Reform practices must be adapted to work within, as well as to change, many of the conditions found in high schools. Suggestions in the school improvement literature on improving high schools can be categorized under three overarching themes:

1. greater rigor and intellectual challenge for all students, with sufficient and appropriate support to ensure their successful learning
2. warmer and closer relationships among students and between students and adults, the latter combining caring with their demands for higher achievement, as "warm demanders"
3. more relevant content and activities that are practical and personalized to engage students' interests and commitment.

The school improvement cycle works best in high schools, as well as at other levels, when professionals are invited into the change process early on, when conditions of relational trust are met, and when time and opportunity are provided for substantive job-embedded professional learning.

In May, 2006, OSPI published *The High Schools We Need: Improving an American Institution*.⁷ This report, based on a review of more than 250 resources, explains the urgent need for improving high schools and offers change processes and practical suggestions for personalizing the institution to benefit students. The document is a useful resource for high schools working to improve and to increase student learning; the document is on the OSPI website.

I. District improvement is receiving more attention from researchers as a support for school improvement. School improvement requires a system-wide approach to reform to improve student learning across schools and districts. School boards have an important leadership role in school and district improvement. In this document, "district" includes school boards and their integral responsibility for school and district policies and procedures. Early improvement initiatives that focused on the individual school as the unit of change often resulted in outstanding schools with improved student learning (Goodlad, 1982, and others). These schools were "islands of excellence" that serve as "existence proof" that schools could improve results for students, often in spite of challenging circumstances. However, extending or scaling-up reform to reach all children cannot occur solely school-by-school. The need to improve student learning across the nation, therefore, has led to more attention to the larger systems of school districts, as well as state and federal roles.

7 <http://www.k12.wa.us/research/default.aspx>

Schools exist within the district organization. Goodlad (1994) explains that the school is “an ecosystem within a district ecosystem, and renewal occurs through networked interaction in which schools and districts work cooperatively towards common goals” (in Hargreaves & Fink, p. 2005). Schools cannot effectively change their policies, programs, and practices in the absence of “permission” from districts at the very least. A district’s specific actions impact schools and their capacity to implement school change and attain higher standards. With the passage of the federal No Child Left Behind law, district improvement is now required when adequate yearly progress is not made at the district level according to certain criteria.

Fullan (2006) emphasizes the links between and among the school, district, and state systems, as well as federal, and the roles and relationships that are necessary to launch and sustain school improvement, in what he calls a “tri-level reform solution.” He states that school improvement requires the “right balance of tightness and looseness to tap into the sources of motivational commitment and energy” necessary to make positive changes (p. 67). Fullan advocates the development of strategies that integrate both top-down and bottom-up forces. In other words, school, community and district, and state levels are called upon “to interact regularly across and within levels” (p. 96). Thus, state interests should be considered in local settings, “while local interests are reflected in state thinking and action.” He suggests that “we need clusters of schools engaged in lateral capacity building, incorporating state and local agendas” instead of local autonomy only (p. 96).

The Research and Evaluation Office at OSPI published the *Characteristics of Improved School Districts*⁸ in 2004. More than 80 research studies and reports were reviewed and analyzed to identify attributes of school districts that engaged in reform. The analysis of the studies revealed thirteen themes. Although these thirteen are similar in some respects to the nine characteristics of high-performing schools, researchers did not “force” the district research into the template of the nine but allowed themes to emerge. These themes then were clustered into four over-arching categories. The characteristics identified in the district improvement literature include:

Effective Leadership

1. Focus on All Students Learning
2. Dynamic and Distributed Leadership
3. Sustained Improvement Efforts Over Time

Quality Teaching and Learning

4. High Expectations and Accountability for Adults
5. Coordinated and Aligned Curriculum and Assessment
6. Coordinated and Embedded Professional Development
7. Quality Classroom Instruction

8 <http://www.k12.wa.us/research/default.aspx>

Support for Systemwide Improvement

8. Effective Use of Data
9. Strategic Allocation of Resources
10. Policy and Program Coherence

Clear and Collaborative Relationships

11. Professional Culture and Collaborative Relationships
12. Clear Understanding of School and District Roles and Responsibilities
13. Interpreting and Managing the External Environment.

The chart on page 15 includes descriptors that further explain the thirteen characteristics of improved school districts.

The *School System Improvement Resource Guide* (SSIRG) provides information and tools to assist school districts with improvement efforts. The resource guide is available on the OSPI and WASA websites.

J. Need-based Allocation of Resources: Funding, Staffing, and Support.

Several studies reveal disparities in how schools and districts support schools with different demographics. School improvement efforts can be stymied by different levels of resource allocations. Research reveals that funding formulas, staffing patterns, and other system support generally provide more resources to schools that enroll the students who are highest achieving and seemingly “easiest to teach.” Education Trust asserts, “(W)e’ve rigged the system against the success of some of our most vulnerable children” (Peske & Haycock, 2006, p. 1). System policies and practices must be examined and adjusted to provide the greatest support to the students with the greatest need.

Typical formulas for funding schools have the effect of under-funding the schools with the most need. Funding, in actual dollars, tends to favor schools with higher achievement and lower poverty and lower minority student populations. Education Trust (2006) conducted an analysis of school funding and found inequalities in how federal education funds are distributed among states and among school districts within states. The study also found “inequalities *within school districts*, with less money spent in schools serving the most disadvantaged students” (p. 1). Roza, Guin, and Davis (2007) also found there is “higher variation in spending across schools than across districts” (p. 21). They write that the “current system of disbursing education funds from the governmental layers works against the best intentions to target funds for student needs” (p. 3). Funding and budgeting are complicated processes, affected by policies, competing purposes, and even record keeping and compliance measures. Researchers call for more transparency in budgeting processes and for clarifying the different levels of resources needed by different students to achieve the learning standards. Some school districts are moving toward student-based funding formulas that are weighted according to student need (Roza, 2006).

Characteristics of Improved School Districts: Themes from Research

Effective Leadership

Focus on Student Learning

- Focus on all students learning to high standards
- Share beliefs & values, have clear goals and shared vision of change
- Hold all district staff, programs and operations responsible for student learning

Dynamic/Distributed Leadership

- Exhibit dynamic leadership, united in purpose, visible in schools, interested in instruction
- Expand to encompass central office, principals, teacher leaders and others
- Provide moral leadership that moves from talking to doing, to ensure students learn

Sustained Improvement Efforts

- View educational improvement as long-term commitment and processes
- Persevere, persist, and stay the course
- Help staff internalize the changes

Quality Teaching and Learning

High Expectations and Accountability for Adults

- Hold all adults accountable for student learning
- Expect excellence, monitor performance, provide feedback
- Make high expectations part of personnel decisions

Coordinated and Aligned Curriculum and Assessment

- Align curriculum with standards, assessment, policies
- Centralize and coordinate curriculum approaches and decisions
- Use multiple measures to assess learning

Coordinated and Embedded Professional Development

- Provide high quality, ongoing professional development focused on classroom instruction
- Include school-based coaching and support for instruction
- Support professional development based on teaching and learning needs in schools

Quality Classroom Instruction

- Pay close attention to instruction, provide guidance and oversight to improve teaching and learning
- Develop a common vision of good instruction
- Monitor instruction, curriculum, and changes in practice

Support for Systemwide Improvement

Effective Use of Data

- Use data to monitor results, equity, accountability, and for resource allocation
- Use data for instructional decisions and professional development
- Provide time and training to staff to use data

Strategic Allocation of Resources

- Provide, allocate, reallocate, and find resources for quality instruction
- Provide additional resources to support low performers
- Give schools flexibility within parameters for resource use

Policy and Program Coherence

- Develop and implement policies that promote equity and excellence
- Review and revise policies as needed to link programs and practices to goals and ensure coherence
- Monitor coherence of actions and programs to district focus, goals

Clear and Collaborative Relationships

Professional Culture and Collaborative Relationships

- Build a culture of mutual respect, collaboration, trust, and shared responsibility
- Support school communities of practice for continuous learning for adults
- Develop central offices as professional learning communities

Clear Understanding of School and District Roles and Responsibilities

- Set expectations, decentralize responsibility, and serve as change agents
- Support learning, serve as mentors, and help seek solutions
- Balance district authority with school flexibility and autonomy

Interpreting and Managing the External Environment

- Analyze, interpret, and mediate state and federal policy with local policy
- Buffer schools from external disturbances and internal distractions
- Mobilize community and business support
- Involve family and community

Another area of inequity is found in the unintended consequences of some teacher assignment policies. In spite of research that demonstrates the impact of teachers on student achievement (Carey, 2004; Darling-Hammond, 2000; Rice, 2003; Zurawsky, 2004), schools with high minority and/or low-income enrollments frequently are staffed with novice or out-of-field teachers. Education Trust studied patterns of teacher quality in three large school districts and three states. The researchers found that regardless of the measure used to describe teacher quality, e.g. experience, certification, content expertise, or test scores, “the pattern is basically the same.” They write, “In state after state, district after district, we take the children who are most dependent upon their teachers for academic learning and assign them to teachers with less of everything. Less experience. Less education. Less knowledge of content. And less actual teaching skill” (Peske & Haycock, p. 11). School improvement and closing the academic achievement gap depend on the expertise of classroom teachers. Many authors emphasize the importance of closing the gaps in funding and in teacher quality by providing the resources for students who have the greatest needs.

Relationships among the Nine Characteristics

The order of the nine characteristics, as presented, is not intended to establish a priority. The research clearly supports the need for all nine to be addressed to achieve deep, lasting school improvement. However, a school leadership team may struggle with the overwhelming nature of reform and ask for guidance in where to begin. School improvement is a continuous cycle of data gathering and analysis, study and consideration, action and reflection, then, repeating the steps. This cycle is essentially action research or an inquiry approach.

Improvement teams need to begin with the student and student learning, with an emphasis on **ALL** students, a concept central to the processes and practices of school improvement. In a nutshell, school improvement teams must **decide what is important** in the school to increase student learning, **establish processes** for implementing what they have determined is most important, **monitor to ensure the effectiveness** of implementation, and finally **reflect and adjust** practices as the cycle continues. The nine characteristics are embedded in these broad categories:

I. Decide what is important

- Identify beliefs and create a vision with a **clear focus** on improving learning and teaching; use **data** to pinpoint areas for concentrated work.
- Establish **high standards and expect** high quality work from students and adults in the system and marshal resources to support them in attaining those standards. The state essential academic learning requirements (EALRs) and grade level expectations (GLEs) provide standards.

- **Align district and school curriculum** with the state essential learning requirements and grade level expectations.
- **Identify quality instructional practices** and **align** with the curriculum, EALRs and GLEs, and assessments.
- Develop and use **common classroom** and **school assessments, aligned** with the curriculum, as benchmarks for student learning.

II. Establish processes and implement what is important

- Recognize, support, and sustain **leadership** at every level, distributed across the school and district; draw upon and enhance the knowledge and skills of leaders as instructional leaders.
- Increase and support **communication and collaboration** in relation to student learning and improved instruction, within the school and throughout the district and community.
- Determine and implement **professional development** needed to improve teaching knowledge and skills related to the areas of focus through school and district professional learning communities.
- Provide appropriate **curriculum materials and assessment** tools to support learning, reflecting cultural competence and relevance.
- **Implement and enhance effective instruction** and monitor learning through use of data.
- **Allocate resources, funding, staffing, and support**, based on greatest needs for improving student learning.

III. Monitor and support the implementation plans

- **Monitor** progress, student learning and quality of student work, and degree of implementation of teaching and learning strategies through **multiple data** sources.
- **Use a variety of assessments** and observation approaches to collect evidence of learning.
- **Reflect and adjust** practices based on evidence of successful learning and teaching.
- **Provide and evaluate** continuous, job-embedded professional development.
- Surround the teaching and learning with **supportive learning environments** that honor and respect individuals.
- Increase **family and community involvement** to improve student learning.
- Enhance **coherence** across schools and linkages between schools and the district as a “webbed” system.

IV. Reflect and adjust

Of these steps, school leadership teams sometimes seem surprised to see the impact of monitoring on improvement of student learning; thus, additional attention

to **monitoring and modification** of practices is in order. Items in the first two sections above are necessary to determine what to monitor and the standards to use in monitoring teaching and learning. Once these steps are accomplished, regular, systematic review of progress through **use of data**, in both the school and the classroom, provides opportunities for additional learning and improving of instruction and occasions for celebrating the school's successes.

Closing the Knowing-Doing Gap

Nearly thirty years ago Ron Edmonds (1979) wrote, "We can, whenever and wherever we choose, successfully teach all children whose schooling is of interest to us... We already know more than we need to do that...Whether or not we do it must finally depend on how we feel about the fact that we haven't so far" (p. 23). Achievement data across our state and the nation illustrate we are not yet doing so. School improvement experts also point out that educators generally know more about improving schools than they are doing. DuFour, Eaker, and DuFour (2005) refer to this discrepancy as the "knowing-doing gap." Reeves (2007) calls it the "implementation gap."

According to some authors, the change processes themselves, or how they are perceived, may get in the way of enacting school improvement. In referring to the implementation of professional learning communities, DuFour, Eaker, and DuFour (2005) list ten barriers citing the work of Pfeffer and Sutton (2000) on organizational management:

1. "substituting a decision for action
2. substituting mission for action
3. planning as a substitute for action
4. complexity as a barrier to action
5. mindless precedent as a barrier to action
6. internal competition as a barrier to action
7. badly designed measurement systems as a barrier to action
8. an external focus as a barrier to action
9. a focus on attitudes as a barrier to action
10. training as a substitute for action" (p. 227-248).

Reeves (2007) suggests a few strategies to "bring implementation closer to reality." He writes, "Close the [implementation] gap with immediate wins, visible recognition of what works, a focus on effectiveness rather than popularity, and an appeal to the values that brought us all into this profession in the first place" (p. 86).

The information and resources in this document are offered to help school leadership teams and staff members as they continue to do the hard work of improving schools, increasing student learning, and closing the implementation gap.

Organization of this resource

Each of the nine characteristics is explained in more detail in the following pages. For each characteristic, the discussion provides

- definitions of the concepts in the characteristic based on research
- explanations of the importance of the characteristic in school improvement
- suggestions of how or where to begin implementing the characteristic for school improvement
- lists of resources for further study or reference.

Although these definitions, explanations, suggestions for implementation, and resources are relatively brief, they draw from relevant research and professional literature to help educators deepen their understanding of the characteristics and to offer them practical ideas, strategies and sample activities for addressing the characteristics. Effectively addressing **all** nine characteristics is more likely to affect student learning. cursory attention to the nine characteristics, however, may lead only to somewhat superficial changes. More effective changes, sometimes called “second order” changes, occur at a deeper level and involve fundamentally changing philosophy, values, attitudes, beliefs, and instructional practices. More superficial “first order” changes such as revising class schedules, discipline policies, or making other organizational adjustments may have little impact on student learning.

As educators are asked to use “scientifically-based research,” particularly in relation to recent federal laws (e.g., No Child Left Behind), they must examine the quality of research studies. Very few studies meet the federal government’s “gold standard” of experimental design.⁹ However, many of the cited studies meet a “silver standard.” The consistency of findings across these studies provides sufficient evidence to have great confidence in their results.

The **nine characteristics**, as they reflect the important components of a school’s purpose, programs, practices, and relationships, are fundamental to **School Improvement Planning**. Consequently they must be embedded in all stages of the planning and implementation processes. This document is a resource to use with the eight stages of school improvement planning (i.e., assessing readiness, collecting data, creating the school portfolio, setting goals, researching and selecting effective practices, crafting action plans, monitoring implementation, and evaluating the plan).¹⁰ This resource is not a substitute or a checklist for the development of the plan.

This resource provides many ideas based on research and professional literature linked to the nine characteristics. The purpose of the document is to help schools implement school improvement—to get beyond making plans to taking action. However, the resource is not exhaustive nor is it a “how to” manual. School leadership can glean ideas from the document and then pursue additional sources for more information.

⁹ <http://www.ed.gov/nclb/methods/whatworks/research/index.html>

¹⁰ <http://www.k12.wa.us/SchoolImprovement/sipguide.aspx>

Suggestions for using this resource

The nine characteristics have been analyzed and discussed in separate sections within this resource. Although the characteristics are interrelated and must be addressed in combination, the resource is organized to permit school improvement teams to emphasize a particular characteristic through study groups and team activity. The references appear at the end of each discussion of definition and implementation suggestions. Thus, pertinent materials can be extracted easily from the document to be used as appropriate.

School Improvement Perception Surveys are tools for schools and district use. School improvement teams will benefit from conducting an analysis of the status of their work, perhaps as “pre and post” assessments or to benchmark progress. Perception surveys such as these check the feelings and thinking of people at a point in time. They are important as indicators but provide only one type of data. The school improvement surveys were developed for use with staff, students, and other stakeholders. The surveys and directions for administering them are included in the document (see Appendix B, p.123) and are available on the website.¹¹ The surveys may be completed by school staff, parents/family members, students, and other stakeholders to help start discussions about the level of school improvement, the degree of implementation of the characteristics, and areas that need more attention. Other organizations have also developed surveys related to the nine characteristics, such as the Center for Educational Effectiveness.

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Nine Characteristics of high-performing schools

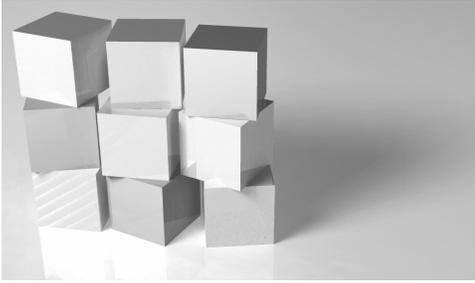
- 1 Clear and Shared Focus.** Everybody knows where they are going and why. The focus is on achieving a shared vision, and all understand their role in achieving the vision. The focus and vision are developed from common beliefs and values, creating a consistent direction for all involved.
- 2 High Standards and Expectations for All Students.** Teachers and staff believe that all students can learn and meet high standards. While recognizing that some students must overcome significant barriers, these obstacles are not seen as insurmountable. Students are offered an ambitious and rigorous course of study.
- 3 Effective School Leadership.** Effective instructional and administrative leadership is required to implement change processes. Effective leaders proactively seek needed help. They nurture an instructional program and school culture conducive to learning and professional growth. Effective leaders have different styles and roles – teachers and other staff, including those in the district office, often have a leadership role.
- 4 High Levels of Collaboration and Communication.** There is strong teamwork among teachers across all grades and with other staff. Everybody is involved and connected to each other, including parents and members of the community, to identify problems and work on solutions.
- 5 Curriculum, Instruction and Assessment Aligned with Standards.** The planned and actual curriculum are aligned with the essential academic learning requirements (EALRs). Research-based teaching strategies and materials are used. Staff understand the role of classroom and state assessments, what the assessments measure, and how student work is evaluated.
- 6 Frequent Monitoring of Learning and Teaching.** A steady cycle of different assessments identify students who need help. More support and instructional time is provided, either during the school day or outside normal school hours. Teaching is adjusted based on frequent monitoring of student progress and needs. Assessment results are used to focus and improve instructional programs.
- 7 Focused Professional Development.** A strong emphasis is placed on training staff in areas of most need. Feedback from learning and teaching focuses extensive and ongoing professional development. The support is also aligned with the school or district vision and objectives.
- 8 Supportive Learning Environment.** The school has a safe, civil, healthy and intellectually stimulating learning environment. Students feel respected and connected with the staff and are engaged in learning. Instruction is personalized and small learning environments increase student contact with teachers.
- 9 High Levels of Family and Community Involvement.** There is a sense that all have a responsibility to educate students, not just teachers and school staff. Families, businesses, social service agencies, and community colleges/universities all play a vital role in this effort.

SELECTED RESOURCES AS STARTING POINTS

Some resources discuss several of the nine characteristics of high-performing schools. The books in the following list provide an effective starting point for busy educators who have limited time for reading. These resources are also useful for school study groups.

- Barth, R. S. (1990). *Improving Schools from Within: Teachers, Parents, and Principals Can Make the Difference*. San Francisco: Jossey-Bass Publishers.
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1. A clear and shared focus

Everybody knows where they are going and why. The focus is on achieving a shared vision, and all understand their role in achieving the vision. The focus and vision are developed from common beliefs and values, creating a consistent direction for all involved.

Definition and explanation

Identifying the **core purpose** of an organization is a critical element of effective school systems as well as successful businesses and other entities. Successful organizations require a sense of what its members are working toward (Peters & Waterman, 1982). Strategic planning, from the business-world, has heightened attention to mission and vision in the last twenty years. More recently, Collins (2001) calls focus the Hedgehog Concept, which he explains is “a single organizing idea, a basic principle or concept that unifies and guides everything” (p. 91). The school improvement literature has emphasized the importance of a clear shared focus in the context of restructuring and educational reform. Effective systems with **strong program coherence**, in other words, programs and practices consistently and tightly connected with the focus, are more likely to impact student achievement positively than fragmented uncoordinated systems (Newmann, Smith, Allensworth, & Byrk, 2001).

Establishing a **focus on learning** is an important first step for improving schools. School and district leaders can focus their own and others’ attention to learning in a variety of ways (Knapp, Copland, Ford, Markholt, McLaughlin, Milliken, & Talbert, 2003). They may demonstrate the focus by their own daily routines or through strategic actions. Leaders may orchestrate a process through which stakeholders develop a focus.

Shared emphasis in a school provides direction and purpose for teacher collaboration and increases certainty regarding teaching practice (Rosenholtz, 1989). A clear focus assists in aligning programs and activities for school improvement. A clear and shared focus includes a **vision that captures the imagination and enthusiasm** of members of the organization as well as **specific goals**, which concentrate attention, effort, and resources. A vision is expressed in a vivid, detailed word picture that de-

scribes the organization or the school as it would appear when its purpose is successfully accomplished. To effectively determine a specific focus, school leadership and stakeholders use collaborative processes to analyze data and **target one or two areas** as school goals and then **build consensus** around them. In other words, high-performing schools succeed in establishing shared, **data-driven** goals, which resonate with the stakeholders.

Implementation suggestions

Several processes have been developed that will assist a school or school district in developing a clear and shared focus. School improvement approaches share several components:

- **Description of “what is”** using an analysis of relevant data, i.e., a profile of the school
- **Identification of gaps** between “what is” and “what should be” which become potential goal areas, i.e., a needs assessment
- **Process for decision making to establish specific goals** or focus involving stakeholders to generate ideas and to respond to ideas, to create **ownership and commitment**
- **Communication** of the goal or focus with the **whole school community**, including families, students, and local business and civic leaders, through open meetings, newsletters, and local media.

Four specific approaches, using various activities, are briefly described below:

1. The approach described by DuFour and Eaker (1998) begins with a **whole staff study to build a foundation** of research and background. These authors suggest several activities that can be used in **building a shared focus**. **Stakeholders** may be asked to project themselves into the future and **describe the school** they would like to have, including the behaviors, attitudes, and interactions they would see.

Sentence stems and questions provide prompts for this activity. For example, **sentence stems** used as prompts include:

- i. “The kind of school I would like my own child to attend would. . .”
- ii. “I want my school to be a place where. . .”

questions as prompts include:

- i. “What would you like to see our school become?”
- ii. “What could we accomplish in the next five years that would make us proud?”

2. An approach suggested by Sagor (1996) uses “**scenario writing**” as a means for creating a shared vision for a school. To begin the process, teachers are asked to write a **personal success story regarding students**. Over a period of time, teachers **pool their stories, review and refine** them. These become a composite scenario that expresses a vision for a school and helps develop a common, schoolwide focus.

3. An approach for goal setting, suggested by the Northwest Regional Educational Laboratory, is based on an **analysis of school data**. *Moving Forward* (Woods, 2002) suggests developing **narrative statements** as part of the process for selecting school goals and for building consensus. Narrative statements describe the school's data regarding student achievement and sometimes may include student behavior. A small group such as a school leadership team analyzes school data and writes the statements, then selects the most important statements. Next staff members individually and finally as a whole staff **rate the degree of satisfaction** they feel with the performance described in the narratives and **the level of importance** they attach to each. A process is used to reach **consensus** on those that are **most important** and with which there is **least satisfaction** with the current performance. This leads to a group decision on a goal area as a focus for the whole staff to improve student learning. In Washington, the "Data Carousel" is frequently used as an activity for analyzing school data. *The School Improvement Planning Process Guide* (2005)¹² describes the activity.

4. **Action research** is another approach that helps a school to determine a clear focus. Action research is a broad school renewal process, sometimes called inquiry or critical study, which includes creating vision and goals, taking action, reviewing progress, then renewing or revising efforts. Emily Calhoun, Carl Glickman, and Richard Sagor have written practical guides for assisting schools in the process of school improvement using action research. Glickman (1993) describes three components of his school improvement model: **a covenant, charter, and critical-study process**. The **covenant** is developed through a democratic process involving all stakeholders and contains beliefs and agreements focused solely on teaching and learning. The covenant is a guide for future decision making. The **charter** is a governance structure for decision making. The **critical study** process is a plan for school improvement that uses the action research cycle.

The **action research steps**, which constitute a cycle of **school renewal**, include

- i. **using data** to set goals and student objectives
- ii. **identifying activities and changes** to be made to accomplish the goals and objectives
- iii. **implementing the steps, which include professional development** and attending to curriculum alignment, instructional and assessment practices and so on
- iv. **evaluating the results of actions** that have been taken to determine next steps.

The *Washington School Improvement Planning Process Guide* (SIP guide) offers an approach for identifying a focus as well as implementing a cycle of school improvement. This practical school improvement resource explains each step of the process and provides useful suggestions for implementation. These steps are

¹² <http://www.k12.wa.us/SchoolImprovement/sipguide.aspx>

1. Assess readiness to benefit [to be embedded in each of the steps in addition to the initial step]
2. Collect, sort, and select data
3. Build and analyze the school portfolio
4. Set and prioritize goals
5. Research and select effective practices
6. Craft action plan
7. Monitor implementation of the plan
8. Evaluate impact on student achievement.

Whatever approach is used initially, a **process for building consensus** is needed to narrow the focus. The **inclusion of all stakeholder groups** is critical to increase ownership of the vision and focus. The identification of a goal area is only the first step. Using the focus as a “**lighthouse**” for setting and maintaining a course of action is essential to creating the conditions needed to increase student performance. The school improvement activities need to be aligned with the focus area to increase coherence in the system and the likelihood of improving student learning.

In *Leading for Learning*, Knapp, et al. (2003) offer ideas to help leaders establish and maintain focus. This resource provides practical suggestions for school and district leaders. Essential tasks for leaders to “focus attention on powerful, equitable learning” involve

1. “Making learning central to their own work
2. Consistently communicating the centrality of student learning
3. Articulating core values that support a focus on powerful, equitable learning
4. Paying public attention to efforts to support learning” (p. 21).

At the school level, principals, teacher leaders, and school improvement coaches can create a focus on learning through their public and persistent actions. They might

- “Regularly visit classrooms and participate in professional learning activities with staff
- Keep up to date with the field and share their learning with others
- Initiate and guide conversations about student learning
- Make student learning a focus for performance evaluation
- Establish teaching and learning as central topics for school-wide faculty meetings
- Examine data about student learning and use it for school planning
- Work with others to set goals for learning improvement and then review progress in relation to these goals” (p. 21).

At the district level, district administrators and professional development staff, for example, may do comparable activities in the schools and they also might

- “Make it their business to be present in the schools, so they are in a position to see learning in action, and also to influence it
- Establish procedures for collecting data about student learning, and regularly share it with school staff
- Make teaching and learning regular topics for district-level administrative meetings
- Select or develop assessment instruments that are aligned with high standards for student learning
- Communicate frequently about student learning to parents, the community, and media
- Make contributions to student learning a primary reference point for district decisionmaking, resource allocation, and personnel evaluation” (p. 22).

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2. High standards and expectations for all students

Teachers and staff believe that all students can learn and meet high standards. While recognizing that some students must overcome significant barriers, these obstacles are not seen as insurmountable. Students are offered an ambitious and rigorous course of study.

Definition and explanation

Standards and expectations address several concepts:

- content standards, which are the learning targets
- performance standards, which answer the question “how good is good enough?”
- expectations, which is confidence that students will meet both the content and performance standards that have been set.

The standards movement has clarified the **academic purpose for schools**. Performance levels have established the **desirable quality of achievement** for students to meet. Educational reformers, business leaders, and university professors are among those calling for higher academic requirements, particularly at the middle and high school levels. They advocate for more rigor and relevance in student class work so students will be better prepared for school, life, and work in a global economy.

Increasing student learning requires that students as well as their teachers believe in their ability to learn to high academic standards. **Changing beliefs** often begins with changing actions. According to Michael Fullan, “We can act our way to new beliefs” (in Saphier, 2005, p. 105). The concept of “effort-based ability” means helping each student develop his or her abilities. **Effort-based ability**, according to Saphier, is the “belief that all students can do rigorous academic work at high standards, even if they are far behind academically and need a significant amount of time to catch up. Educators who carry this belief into their practice are not unrealistic about the obstacles they and their students face. They simply have not given up. And we know for sure that they will get results if they translate this belief into appropriate practice” (p. 86). The concept of effort-based ability is also discussed in “Supportive learning environment” on page 112.

Research, beginning with studies in the late 1960's, describes the impact of teachers' expectations on student performance. Teacher expectations may be described according to three general types:

1. teacher's **perceptions** of a student's current level
2. teacher's **prediction** about the amount of academic progress a student will make over a given time
3. degree to which a teacher "**over- or under-estimates** a student's present level of performance" (Bamburg, 1994).

The concept of teacher expectations has been called the "Pygmalion" effect (Rosenthal & Jacobson, 1968/1992) or "self-fulfilling prophecy" (Good & Brophy, 2000). Student behavior is affected by opinions and perceptions that others have for them which in turn become self-fulfilling prophecies. Good and Brophy describe the process as follows:

1. "The **teacher expects different, specific behavior and achievement** from particular students.
2. Because of these different expectations, the **teacher behaves differently** toward various students.
3. This **treatment tells students what behavior and achievement the teacher expects from them** and how they are expected to behave and perform.
4. If this treatment is consistent over time, and if students do not resist or change it in some way, it will likely **affect their self-concepts, achievement, motivation, levels of aspiration, classroom conduct and interactions** with the teacher.
5. These effects generally will complement and reinforce the teacher's expectations, so that **students will come to conform to these expectations** more than they might have otherwise.
6. With time, students' achievement and behavior will conform more and more closely to that originally expected of them. **High-expectations students will be led to achieve at high levels, while low-expectations students will not gain** as much as they could have" (p. 79).

Research suggests that teachers tend to have **lower expectations for students of color and poor students** than for white students and more affluent students. "Teachers' attitudes and expectations, as well as their knowledge of how to incorporate the cultures, experiences, and needs of their students into their teaching, significantly influence what students learn and the quality of their learning opportunities" (Banks, Cochran-Smith, Moll, Richert, Zeichner, LePage, Darling-Hammond, Duffy, & McDonald, 2005, p. 243). Students of color and poor students are more often assigned to remedial or low track classes; they rarely have access to coursework necessary for college entry. Ferguson (1998) notes that black students are more affected by teacher perceptions than are white students. Students are aware of the differences in the way teachers treat students believed to be high and low achievers, and some students see the differential treatments as biased and inappropriate (Good & Brophy, 2000), as do some parents and teachers.

In addition to low expectations, students of color and in poverty are also impacted by disparities in resources devoted to their schooling. Some researchers assert that the students with the greatest learning challenges receive the fewest resources, in quality of teaching, level of funding, and other academic support (Carey, 2004; Peske & Haycock, 2006; Roza, Guin, & Davis, 2007).

Researchers identify **approaches to instruction that increase learning for all students** including students of color and poverty. According to research by Newmann and associates (1996), **authentic pedagogy brings equal achievement benefits** to students of different gender, socioeconomic status, race, and ethnicity. In another study, Newmann (1998) reports that “students who were offered what he labeled an ‘authentic’ curriculum, similar to the one mandated by the national curriculum standards, achieved at levels two to three times higher than students in traditional, skill-oriented classrooms with low ‘authenticity’ (in Daniels, Bizar, & Zemelman, 2002, p. 15). Students also tend to perform at higher levels when they are taught the “key ideas and processes contained in content standards in rich and engaging ways...” (McTighe, Seif, & Wiggins, 2004, p. 28).

Students are expected to develop **competencies for the workplace, lifelong learning, citizenship, and personal growth and health** (Wagner, 2002). As expectations for college and career readiness increase, researchers and reform advocates call for **more rigor and higher quality intellectual work from all students**, particularly at the secondary level. Zemelman, Daniels, and Hyde (2005) write, “Students learn best when faced by **genuine challenges, choices, and responsibility in their own learning**” (p. 10). Newmann and Wehlage (1995) assert that “**all students are capable of engaging in [complex] cognitive work** when the work is adapted to their levels of development” (p. 9).

A study sponsored by the American Diploma Project (ADP) found that the **knowledge and skills required for college and the workplace have converged**. According to the report, “Successful preparation for both **postsecondary education and employment requires learning the same rigorous English and mathematics** content and skills” (ADP, 2004, Executive Summary, p. 4). A study conducted by ACT and Education Trust (2004) looked at the academic factors that increase the potential for success in college for all students. The study concludes that taking the **right kind of courses**, i.e., college preparatory curricula, is critical. In another project, Conley (2005) outlines the content expectations that students need to succeed in college. Conley describes how high schools can organize to help students succeed in postsecondary endeavors. He explores the idea that “**intellectual coherence**” in curriculum **across courses** can lead to progressively more challenging and engaging learning experiences. He posits that such an intellectually coherent curricula “will thoroughly prepare high school students for what they will face when they enter college” (p. xiv).

Other researchers found a relationship between a “constrained curriculum,” focused on challenging academic courses, and reducing dropouts. In their study on school organization and dropping out, Lee and Burkam (2001) write, “A growing body of research demonstrates that **students learn more, and learning is distributed more**

equitably, in schools with a constrained curriculum, consisting largely of academic courses and with few low-level courses. In schools with such a ‘constrained curriculum,’ students typically are required to complete many of these courses to graduate” (p. 8). These researchers conclude, “[T]he **structure of the high school curriculum is associated with holding students in high school until graduation**. Regardless of students’ own academic background and school performance, schools with . . . ‘a constrained academic curriculum’—more challenging courses, fewer remedial or non-academic courses—hold students in school” (p. 24).

Implementation suggestions

Teacher behavior generally corresponds with their perceptions of the students’ abilities. School staff should set high expectations for performance and behavior for students and work collaboratively to review and improve their own instructional practices. Teachers must **examine their practices to ensure fair and equitable treatment of all students**. A variety of strategies can be used to assist teachers in this process. **Peer observations** help to “mirror” classroom behavior so a teacher can make adjustments if necessary. **Video taping** class instruction can provide feedback as well. **Listening to students** is also revealing as teachers, or a third party, may use surveys to ask for student perceptions of classroom activities and environment.

The following steps might be used to **examine the level of expectations** held for a class. Teachers can

- Focus, individually or as part of a team, on **questioning strategies**, which are important instructional tools that often reflect expectations
- Read and discuss the research in a **study group setting**
- **Work together** to improve their use of the strategies
- **Reflect on instructional practice** related to expectations

Research findings by Good and Brophy (2000) provide examples of **differential teacher treatment of high and low achievers** drawn from reviews of the research. The following questions, which are examples adapted from Good and Brophy’s research findings, help guide teachers in reflecting on their practice:

Teachers should ask: Am I . . .

1. providing sufficient **wait time** for all students to answer questions?
2. helping all students **improve their responses** to questions by giving clues or repeating or rephrasing questions?
3. providing all students with appropriate **reinforcement** and not inadvertently rewarding incorrect answers or inappropriate behavior?
4. giving **feedback** to public responses of all students regardless of level of achievement?
5. calling on all students to respond to questions that include **analysis and high cognitive content**?
6. seating **struggling students** closer to the teacher?

7. using **eye contact and communicating nonverbally** through attention and responsiveness (leaning forward, nodding head positively) in interaction with all students.
8. holding **high expectations** for all students?
9. engaging all students with **friendly interaction**, smiling, and providing non-verbal indicators of support?
10. using **effective**, even when time consuming, **instructional methods** with all students?
11. exposing all students to a **rich curriculum** including lesson-extending discussion, application and high level thinking tasks?
12. being **fair-handed** in administering and grading tests and assignments including treatment in borderline cases?

Three suggestions from Good and Brophy are helpful in avoiding negative expectation effects:

1. Consider students' **full range of abilities** when developing expectations, including different types of intellectual abilities.
2. Keep **expectations flexible and current**. Teachers need to keep expectations in perspective to be sure interpretations of what they notice in classrooms are accurate.
3. Emphasize the positive by providing **feedback, diagnosis, re-teaching, and "stretching** the students' minds by stimulating them and encouraging them to achieve as much as they can" (p. 108-109).

By becoming culturally competent, educators can raise their expectations of diverse students. **Cultural competence** is "the ability to relate and communicate effectively with people of a different culture, economic background, or language" (Henderson, Mapp, Johnson, & Davies, 2007, p. 121). Culturally competent schools and classrooms reflect these attributes:

- "Students are respected and responded to in warm and accepting ways.
- Students have opportunities to find connections between their lives and what they are studying.
- Students' knowledge, culture, and learning styles are considered and incorporated into class instruction.
- Teachers and school staff are familiar with their students' home cultures and know how to work in multicultural settings" (Council for Exceptional Children, in Henderson, et al., p. 121).

Changing Perceptions through Collaborative Work

Teachers who engage in **collaborative curriculum planning and assessing of student work** can examine their perceptions and assumptions about students and their learning. These activities may reveal differences in expectations and standards. The developers of the Collaborative Analysis of Student Learning (CASL) system note

that when teachers work together analyzing student work they are encouraged to reflect on their own practice. In doing so, they may find they have given up on a student too soon or they may determine that changes in their instruction can make a difference in student work (Langer, Colton, & Goff, 2003). (See pages 58 and 101 for further discussions of CASL.) Also, when teachers plan, teach, and assess units together, using **common lessons and assessments**, they have a basis for comparison to check how well their students are performing. These opportunities may encourage teachers to raise their expectations as well as their support of their students (Schmoker, 2006).

Increasing Rigor and Relevance

Authentic pedagogy, advanced thinking skills, and application of learning to new or different situations are ways to increase rigor and relevance in curriculum and student learning. These approaches can be applied at all levels and in all content areas. Authentic pedagogy is instruction that **emphasizes intellectual quality** and includes **construction of knowledge**, disciplined **inquiry**, and **value beyond school**, according to research by Newmann and Wehlage (1995). These important components, or standards, for instruction and assessment increase student achievement across student groups.

Langer (2004) gives guidance for increasing rigor and relevance in instruction, which is applicable to all grade levels across curriculum content areas. For “**minds-on**” student engagement, she suggests that educators

- “**Treat learning as a process of questioning, trying out, and grappling with new ideas and skills**
- Aim to teach students a **network of understandings, to connect and use in new ways**
- **Treat ‘getting it’ as groundwork to teach deeper understandings**
- Help students **relate new learning to larger issues** in the discipline and the world
- Teach strategies for **ways to think about and use the content** in assignments and activities” (p. 52).

Schools and policy makers also may increase the rigor of students’ educational experiences by requiring certain coursework, with the appropriate support needed for successful learning. For example, ACT and Education Trust (2004) recommend that

- “All students should be provided with a **rigorous college-oriented** curriculum.
- All students should have the benefit of **teachers qualified to teach** these rigorous college-oriented courses.
- All students should be provided with **help outside the classroom** when needed.
- The **content of current core preparatory courses** should be reevaluated to ensure that they are focused on the **rigorous skills** needed for college and work readiness” (p. vi).

To meet high learning standards for all students, schools also need to examine their **resource allocations** and **how they are determined**, with attention to teacher expertise, academic support including learning time and opportunity, and instructional materials. Students with the most need, who are lowest performing and who face challenges such as poverty or learning English, must receive the greatest levels of support. These students need the strongest teachers along with sufficient time and opportunity to learn the standards.

Research over recent years has shown that authentic classroom assignments, interactive teaching, and strong social support in the classroom all lead to higher standardized test scores. High standards and expectations require more than lip service. The mantra “all students can learn” must be followed by **instructional practices and teacher behavior that demonstrate that teachers believe in the students, believe in their own efficacy to teach students to high standards**, and that **they will persist in teaching them**. Teaching advanced skills and teaching for understanding together with basic skills are essential if all students are to achieve at high levels.

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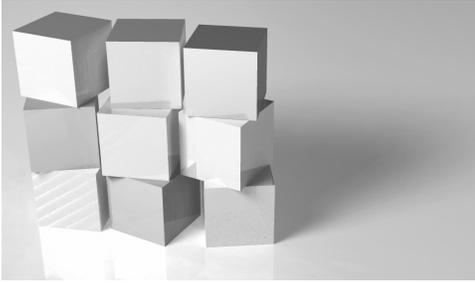
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3. Effective school leadership

Effective instructional and administrative leadership is required to implement change processes. Effective leaders are proactive and seek help that is needed. They also nurture an instructional program and school culture conducive to learning and professional growth. Effective leaders can have different styles and roles—teachers and other staff, including those in the district office, often have a leadership role.

Definition and explanation

Effective school leadership has been characterized according to qualities exhibited by successful leaders as well the views of teachers. Burns (1978) provides a general definition of leadership as the influence of persons to achieve goals held mutually by leaders and followers through the use of institutional, political, psychological, and other resources. These goals represent “... the values and the motivations—the wants and needs, the aspiration and expectations—of both leaders and followers” (p. 19). As indicated by Burns, **leadership depends upon relationships and shared values between leaders and followers.**

Collins (2001), Elmore (2000), and others have “deromanticized” leadership as their research reveals qualities of effective leaders. Rather than heroic, high-profile, charismatic leaders, the “good-to-great leaders” in Collins’ research were more likely to “channel their ego” into the larger goals for their company as “their ambition is first and foremost for the institution, not themselves” (p. 21). Collins calls these leaders “Level 5 Executive” leaders who build “enduring greatness through a paradoxical blend of personal humility and professional will” (p. 20). Collins identifies the levels of leadership as follows:

- Level 1: Highly Capable Individual
- Level 2: Contributing Team Member
- Level 3: Competent Manager
- Level 4: Effective Leader
- Level 5: Executive

Research and professional literature have emphasized the critical role of the principal in improving schools and increasing student achievement. Effective principals, with good leadership skills, increase the likelihood that school improvement will occur. Other school and district staff should also share leadership roles and responsibilities essential to improving schools. In a recent meta-analysis, Waters and Marzano (2006) found a positive relationship between school district leadership and student achievement and identified district-level leadership responsibilities that correlate to student achievement.

Deeper Understanding of Effective Leadership

Distributed and sustained leadership and lateral capacity building are concepts that deepen and expand understanding of leadership in school improvement. These concepts, found in current research, are described briefly below:

The concept of distributive leadership acknowledges and promotes leadership that exists throughout the organization. This concept moves beyond identifying leadership solely in the traditional leader to recognizing the leadership functions that may be assumed or assigned to teacher leaders and others in districts and schools. Elmore (2000) argues that leadership cannot reside only in designated leaders because the tasks of teaching and learning are too complex. Also, he contends, most of the improvement must come from the **people who are directly responsible for instruction**, not from the management of instruction. **Leadership needs to be distributed** throughout a school organization based on individual predispositions, interests, knowledge, skills, and roles. Distributed leadership means “**multiple sources of guidance and direction**, following the contours of expertise in an organization, made coherent through a common culture” (p. 15).

Spillane (2006) addresses the practice or “how” of leadership, not just the “who.” He emphasizes that distributive leadership is a way of viewing **leadership as the leader plus other leaders at work in a particular context**; thus, distributive leadership involves leaders, followers, and the immediate context or situation. Therefore, leadership practice is generated fundamentally in the interactions among these elements. Principals still are viewed as critical to effective school improvement. The school, however, succeeds due to the leadership efforts of others as well as the principal. McLaughlin and Talbert (2006) explain, “Strong learning communities develop when principals learn to relinquish a measure of control and help others participate in building leadership throughout the schools” (p. 81).

Sustaining school change and improvement requires continuous effort, maintaining and monitoring change processes. According to Hargreaves and Fink (2006), “Change in education is easy to propose, hard to implement, and extraordinarily difficult to sustain” (p. 1). Sustaining change, therefore, requires planning for turnover in leadership. Identification and selection of new leaders, superintendents and principals in particular, can make or break reform efforts. Careful attention to hiring new leaders can help maintain and increase momentum for school improvement. Hargreaves and Fink assert that **sustainable leadership puts student “learning at the center** of everything leaders do. Students’ learning comes first, then everyone

else's in support of it" (p. 27). Sustaining school improvement requires attention to other aspects of the organization as well. These researchers develop **seven principles of sustainability** in educational change and leadership: depth, length, breadth, justice, diversity, resourcefulness, and conservation. They explain that sustainable leadership "matters," "lasts," "spreads," "does no harm but improves the surrounding environment," "promotes cohesive diversity," "develops internal and human resources," and "honors and learns from the best of the past to create an even better future" (p. 18-20).

Lateral capacity building emphasizes the need for paying attention to and providing **support across schools and districts** in "scaling up" school reform. Some researchers caution that one school cannot succeed at the expense of another when the ultimate goal is to improve learning for all students. Therefore, leaders are urged to learn from one another and collaboratively to increase their knowledge and skills for improving schools. Fullan (2005, 2006) stresses school leaders must reach beyond the usual boundaries of their organization to support, teach, and learn from one another. He calls this lateral capacity building. **Collaboration across schools and districts**, according to Fullan, "pays enormous dividends in relation to new knowledge and wider commitment." Such collaboration creates networks or clusters that can "reduce both intraschool classroom-to-classroom variations as well as school-to-school differences" (p. 58). Hargreaves and Fink (2006) also call upon leaders to take responsibility beyond their own organizations. They write, "The challenge of educational leadership, therefore, is to commit to the public good as well as care for the private good of one's own students and their parents. It is to care for the students and teachers in neighboring schools whom our leadership choices affect, not just your own" (p. 151).

Relational trust as an essential resource for school improvement has emerged from extensive research. Hargreaves and Fink (2006) assert that "trust is an indispensable resource for improvement" (p. 212), the "**social glue**" necessary to develop school-based professional community (p. 123). Bryk and Schneider (2002) found that the quality of social relationships had a "powerful role" in successful school improvement efforts in schools they studied. These researchers found relational trust served as a resource for school improvement in four broad ways. Relational trust

- serves as a "catalyst for innovation"
- "facilitates public problem solving"
- "helps coordinate meaningful collective action"
- "constitutes a moral resource for school improvement" as participants focus on the best interests of children and develop "mutual obligations with one another" (p. 33-34).

Tschannen-Moran (2004) defines trust as "**one's willingness to be vulnerable** to another based on the confidence that the other is **benevolent, honest, open, reliable, and competent**" (p. 17). Trust is a choice; it may vary depending on context, changing circumstances, and the nature of relationships or interdependence in the organization. She writes that the behavior of leaders can foster or diminish trust in a school.

“It is the duty of the person with greater power within a hierarchy to accept greater responsibility for the cultivation of trust” (p. 187). She explains the five facets of trust which apply to all school stakeholders—teachers, staff, families, and students:

1. **Benevolence** is the “most essential ingredient and commonly recognized facet of trust. It is a **“sense of caring;”** the confidence that one’s well-being or something one cares about will be protected and not harmed by the trusted party...Trust rests on the assurance that one can count on the good will of another to act in one’s best interest....” This aspect is particularly important when one is dependent upon another as in the relationship among parents, students and educators or teachers and administrators (p. 19).
2. **Honesty** means that one can be trusted to do what one says, tell the truth, and keep promises. “Correspondence between a person’s statements and deeds characterizes integrity.” There is a **match between words and actions.** (p. 22).
3. **Openness** is “a process by which people make themselves **vulnerable to others by sharing** information, influence, and control.” Openness “initiates a kind of reciprocal trust.” Sharing knowledge also increases “vulnerability because with knowledge comes power” (p. 25).
4. **Reliability** is a sense that “one is able to depend on another consistently.” Reliability is more than predictability, since someone may predictably demonstrate negative behaviors or attitudes. “Reliability, or dependability, combines a sense of **predictability with caring**” (p. 28-29).
5. **Competence** is “the **ability to perform a task as expected,** according to appropriate standards.” Tschannen-Moran states, “In high-trust schools, principals set high standards and “hold teachers accountable in ways that seem fair and reasonable to their staff” (p. 31). Teachers respect principals for their competence. Students depend on the competence of their teachers.

Other educational and organizational researchers identify different traits; however, the themes are quite similar to those of Tschannen-Moran. For example, Bryk and Schneider (2002) identify four “lenses” or criteria that help discern trust in relationships: respect, competence, personal regard for others, and integrity. Galford and Drapeau (2002), using their research on corporations and businesses, distinguish among strategic, organizational, and personal trust. They write that organizational trust requires a “critical mass of personal trust” (p. 89). They identify the elements of personal trust as credibility, reliability, intimacy, and self-interest. Organizational components of trust-building include articulation, aspirations, abilities, alignment, and actions.

Organizations, as human endeavors, inevitably give rise to obstacles that can impede or erode healthy relational trust. “Resistance factors,” according to Galford and Drapeau (2002), include “skepticism, fear, frustration, and an embedded we-they mindset” (p. 101). These factors may be deeply or widely found in an organization. The authors offer suggestions to help leaders overcome resistance factors. For example, leaders should be consistent in their messages and standards, handle incompetence forthrightly, provide honest feedback, confront issues and rumors, demonstrate

trust in others by delegating, listen with genuine interest, and if trust is lost, start over to re-build trust (Galford & Drapeau, 2003).

Tschannen-Moran includes four surveys in *Trust Matters: Leadership for Successful Schools* that can help school practitioners as well as researchers study and understand trust in schools. There are surveys for faculty, principal, parents, and students. The appendixes also include directions for administering and scoring the surveys.

Leadership Attributes and Behavior

Rich descriptions of leadership attributes and behavior are provided by researchers and authors. Some of the perspectives that further describe and explain effective leadership are discussed below.

In writing about effective educational leadership, Sergiovanni (1990) describes dimensions of “**value-added leadership**” which can create “extraordinary” school performance. These dimensions include **performance investment** (which results from “opportunities to experience deep satisfaction with one’s work”) (p. 19); **symbols and meaning** (which help create an environment that binds people together); **purpose** (the beliefs and vision of a school); **enabling teachers and schools** (giving latitude to take action linked with the beliefs and vision); **accountability** (school-based responsibility for decision making and results); **intrinsic motivation, collegiality, and leadership** by “outrage” (a symbol of importance and meaning related to a school’s purpose which may take the form of both “leading and prodding”) (p. 24).

Barth (1990) emphasizes the importance of a **vision** to unite a school staff, to form a **community of learners and a community of leaders** for improving schools from within. He argues that everyone—students, teachers, parents, and administrators—is capable of leading and of becoming an active member in “a community of leaders” (p. xvi).

Other recent research identified leadership attributes in relation to student learning. Marzano, Waters, and McNulty (2005) found 21 leadership attributes that have positive effects on student learning. Of these attributes, **seven in particular were linked to promoting second-order change**. Second-order change requires changes in attitudes, beliefs, and values that are more likely to affect student learning, in contrast to first-order change that is related to structural or organizational changes that may not affect student learning. These seven leadership attributes follow:

1. knowledge of curriculum, instruction, and assessment (“is knowledgeable about current curriculum, instruction, and assessment practices”)
2. intellectual stimulation (“ensur(ing) faculty are aware of most current theories and practices and make discussion of these a regular aspect of the school’s culture”)
3. monitoring and evaluating (“monitors the effectiveness of school practices and their impact on student learning”)

4. ideals and beliefs (“communicates and operates from strong ideals and beliefs about schooling”)
5. change agent (“willing to challenge and actively challenges the status quo”)
6. flexible (“adapts his or her leadership behavior to the needs of the current situation and is comfortable with dissent”)
7. optimizer (“inspires and leads new and challenging innovations”) (p. 42-43).

The sourcebook *Leading for Learning* lists ways that leaders influence learning: by focusing on learning, professional development, environmental engagement, strategic actions, and coherence – elements that interact reciprocally. The sourcebook provides an inclusive picture of instructional leadership. In schools, it is the joint work of principals, assistant principals, department heads, school-based mentors and coaches, teacher leaders, and others. “At the district level, it implies superintendents, assistant or deputy superintendents, school board members, directors and coordinators, and district-supported staff with crosscutting assignments, not to mention leaders in the community who play a role in guiding and supporting the district’s work” (Knapp, Copland, Ford, Markholt, McLaughlin, Milliken, & Talbert, 2003, p. 14).

Based on a meta-analysis of research, Waters and Marzano (2006) found a positive correlation between **responsibilities of effective superintendents and student achievement**. Five responsibilities, all related to setting direction and keeping districts focused on teaching and learning, were influential. These included

1. “Collaborative goal-setting,” involving central office staff, school-level administrators, and board members.
2. “Non-negotiable goals for achievement and instruction,” ensuring consistent use of research-based instructional strategies to reach learning goals.
3. “Board alignment and support of district goals for achievement and instruction;” no other initiatives were allowed to “detract attention or resources from accomplishing these goals.”
4. “Monitoring goals for achievement and instruction”; the goals were “the driving force behind a district’s actions.”
5. “Use of resources to support achievement and instruction goals”; “superintendents ensure that the necessary resources, including time, money, personnel, and materials, are allocated to accomplish the district’s goals” (p. 3-4).

Implementation suggestions

Effective leaders in high-performing schools may exhibit various leadership styles and use different decision-making models. However, some **qualities seem to be shared**, in part if not totally. Effective school leaders do the following:

- lead by example
- focus first on students and their learning
- support and empower their colleagues

- are learners
- understand change processes
- recognize and reward the achievement and struggles of others
- invite participation and share responsibility
- use expectations to change attitude and behavior
- create safe learning environments in which others can take risks to improve.

Blase & Kirby (2000) offer insights from teachers' perspectives on the qualities and everyday strategies of **open and effective school principals** that tend to positively **influence, motivate, and empower** school staff members. Such strategies include these examples:

- "Praise teachers' efforts [giving recognition and expressing appreciation]
- Convey high expectations for teacher and student performance
- Actively involve teachers in decision making
- Provide teachers the autonomy (freedom) to try creative approaches
- Support teachers by providing materials, training opportunities, and backing in student discipline matters
- Nudge teachers to consider alternative solutions to instruction and discipline problems
- Judiciously evoke the power of authority
- Consistently model effective practice" (p. 120).

Leadership Approaches

Creating collaborative professional learning communities is an approach principals and school leaders can use to improve student learning. The **involvement of all stakeholders** is necessary to develop collaborative professional learning communities. Barth (1990) states that a "good school... is a place where **everyone is teaching and everyone is learning**--simultaneously, under the same roof" (p. 163). He writes that adults enter into a collaborative relationship and create an "ecology of reflection, growth, and refinement of practice" (p. 162). Principals and district office leaders also can tap leadership talent among staff members by providing professional development for staff that have interest and potential and can empower staff members by delegating responsibility and mentoring them to insure success.

What can leaders, school principals or other persons, do to enhance their effectiveness, particularly as instructional leaders? Although leadership is a complex combination of personal dispositions, beliefs and learning, the following steps can be taken to assist in **creating a culture for school improvement**.

1. Develop positive, **respectful relationships** with staff, parents, and students. Steps to help create these relationships include
 - being visible in classrooms, hallways, school grounds, and at community activities

- listening attentively and following through on commitments; building trust by keeping one's word and respecting others' views
- modeling the behavior and attitudes that are expected of others; hold up a “mirror” to reflect on the “messages” one conveys
- being positive and optimistic; demonstrating a belief in the efficacy of staff and students
- reading, learning, and sharing effective practices, research findings, and inspiration
- demonstrating the qualities of relational trust, e.g. benevolence, honesty, openness, reliability, and competence as identified by Tschannen-Moran (2004).

2. Create a **professional learning community**. Steps to assist in developing a professional learning community include

- developing school mission, beliefs, and vision collaboratively with involvement of all stakeholder groups
- developing agreements and guidelines for decision making and other appropriate procedures for governing the school through collaborative processes
- delegating responsibilities and providing professional autonomy within the parameters of the mission and vision
- staying current on research and regularly engaging others in dialogue
- creating opportunities for staff to learn together through study groups or other mechanisms; finding time for professional work during the school day to the extent possible.

3. **Focus on learning** and review school rules, routines, curriculum and instruction to **ensure coherence** in the system. Steps to assist in emphasizing the focus include

- communicating the importance of learning goals through consistent messages (for example, asking students, “What have you read?” not just, “How was the ballgame?”)
- engaging adults in study groups to improve instruction; encouraging adults to mentor or coach one another, or to provide feedback, to improve instruction
- using regular meeting times as opportunities for staff to share their learning and their instructional practice and for professional development
- supporting appropriate curriculum mapping, deep alignment, and instructional improvement efforts, determining priorities for Grade Level Expectations and learning targets
- providing opportunities and resources for grade level and content teams to develop common assessments and analyze student work collaboratively.

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4. High levels of collaboration and communication

There is strong teamwork among teachers across all grades and with other staff. Everybody is involved and connected to each other, including parents and members of the community, to identify problems and work on solutions.

Definition and explanation

Collaboration is defined by Webster's dictionary as **working jointly with others or together**, especially in an intellectual endeavor. Collegiality is often used as a synonym to describe sharing of authority among colleagues. Collaboration is a term popularly used to describe a variety of joint endeavors in school improvement. Co-operative work among teachers is one dimension; shared participation in school governance is another; partnerships among schools and businesses for financial support and collaboration among schools and other public agencies to provide social services are others (Johnson, 2000, in Pounder, 1998, p. 9). Although all of these activities are important, this section will focus primarily on **collaboration among school staff, teachers, and principals**, in the interest of improving student learning. Other themes are treated under other characteristics of high-performing schools.

Within the context of collaboration among school practitioners, the following definition from Little (1981) is particularly appropriate: "Collegiality is the presence of four specific behaviors, as follows: Adults in schools *talk about practice*. These conversations about teaching and learning are frequent, continuous, concrete, and precise. Adults in schools *observe each other* engaged in the practice of teaching and administration. These observations become the practice to reflect on and talk about. Adults engage together in *work on curriculum* by planning, designing, researching, and evaluating curriculum. Finally, adults in schools *teach each other* what they know about teaching, learning, and leading. Craft knowledge is revealed, articulated, and shared" (in Barth, 1990, p. 31).

Several **outcomes may be associated with collegiality**. According to Little, "Decisions tend to be better; implementation of decisions is better; there is a higher level of morale and trust among adults; adult learning is energized and more likely to be sustained. There is even some evidence that motivation of students and *their* achieve-

ment rises, and evidence that when adults share and cooperate, students tend to do the same” (in Barth, p. 31).

Rosenholtz’s study (1987) on teacher work environment emphasizes the **importance of collaboration for teacher efficacy and student achievement**. From the research data, Rosenholtz identified “moving” and “stuck” schools. Moving schools were characterized by consensus on goals, teacher sharing and mutually helping one another, participating in decision making related to their work, and opportunities to increase their own learning. Most teachers in moving schools expressed a hopeful and positive view of themselves and their capacity—that “everything was possible” (p. 210).

Collaboration requires **interdependence** and may be perceived as a loss of autonomy and discretion (Barott & Raybould, 1998, in Pounder, p. 29). The potential for conflict also arises with such interdependence. However, Pounder writes that teacher work groups produce more enriched and more motivating work than does traditional individual teacher work (p. 74). The findings from the Rosenholtz study also build confidence that there are more benefits than costs to collaboration for the professional as well as for students.

Researchers call schools that continuously work together to seek and share learning and to act on their learning “communities of continuous inquiry and improvement,” communities of practice, or professional learning communities. **Professional learning communities** are built on and promote effective collaboration and communication. Professional learning communities require a **clear, relentless focus on student learning and joint work** to improve student learning. A growing consensus believes that professional learning communities have tremendous potential to affect student learning. “If there is anything that the research community agrees on, it is this: The right kind of continuous, structured teacher collaboration improves the quality of teaching and pays big, often immediate, dividends in student learning and professional morale in virtually any setting” (Schmoker, 2005, p. xii). Effective professional learning communities provide on-site, job-embedded, and continuous professional development. The topic is discussed on page 101.

Research by Newmann and Wehlage (1995) found that **student learning increased** in response to the **increased capacity of the school organization** as educators focused on teaching and learning, shared their work, and took joint responsibility for student learning. The mark of effective professional learning communities, according to some experts, is for educators to collaboratively work to

- **Develop curricula and lessons**
- Identify and commit to **common learning and performance proficiency standards** for students
- Create and give **common formative assessments**
- Analyze **student data** for gaps between expectations and outcomes
- Review and score **student work** together
- **Identify strengths and weaknesses** in student learning based on the work

- Determine next steps to **build on student strengths**
- **Work together to improve classroom practices** (DuFour, Eaker, & DuFour, 2005; McLaughlin & Talbert, 2006; Schmoker, 2006).

Indicators of a context open to change include many that are related to collaboration:

- **Reducing isolation** includes policies that foster collaboration, effective communication, collegial relationships, a sense of community, and reduction of isolation
- **Increasing staff capacity** includes policies that provide greater autonomy, staff development, and involvement in decision-making
- Providing a **caring, productive environment** includes positive teacher attitudes, students' heightened interests and engagement with learning
- **Positive and caring relationships** among staff, students, administrators, supportive community attitudes, and parents
- Promoting **increased quality**, a norm of continuous critical inquiry, continuous improvement, and shared vision or sense of purpose (Boyd & Hord, 1994, in Hall & Hord, 2001).

Implementation suggestions

Traditional school organization, teacher responsibility, and structures of time and space must be reviewed and altered for collaboration to occur. Typical school organization perpetuates teacher isolation, fragments time, and generally encourages autonomy and personal discretion rather than collaborative actions. Specific changes to school organization may include

- using common planning time for teachers
- assigning teams of teachers to groups of students
- setting aside regularly scheduled blocks of time for in-depth professional development
- developing teacher work groups for given projects
- implementing professional development that promotes collaboration, such as faculty study groups and looking at student work.

However, just making superficial changes in structure will not guarantee collaboration unless the connections between the structures and the impacts on instructional practice are made clear (Elmore, 2002). Faculties must have **sustained opportunity and engagement** to get beyond their differences to the point where they understand and learn from one another. "Sustaining professional communities requires relationships that are sufficiently formed and stable over time to engender trust; shared values that grow through interaction as well as selection into the community; and, a reason for coming together, such as a task or responsibility that requires collaboration. Leaders have many ways of nurturing these relationships, encouraging the sharing of values that support learning, and structuring joint work for community members to tackle," argue Knapp, Copland, Ford, Markholt, McLaughlin, Milliken, and Talbert (2003, p. 25).

Little (1981) describes **the key role of the principal** in collaborative schools. She found that the prevalence of collegiality in a school was closely related to four specific behaviors of the principal:

1. “States expectations explicitly for cooperation among teachers.
2. Models collegiality, that is, enacts it by joining with teachers and other principals working collaboratively to improve conditions in the school.
3. Rewards collegiality by granting release time, recognition, space, materials, or funds to teachers who work as colleagues.
4. Protects teachers who initially engage in collegial behavior and thereby risk the retribution of their fellows” (cited in Barth, 1990, p. 33).

“Strong professional communities are built when principals and staff enhance their resources by reinforcing a **climate of support and respect** for teachers’ work and by pursuing a **continuous cycle of innovation, feedback, and redesign** in curriculum, instruction, and assessment. Teachers’ capacity to teach well is enhanced when professional opportunities are focused, coherent, and sustained (rather than diffused, fragmented and episodic)” (Newmann & Wehlage, 1995, in Lieberman & Miller, 1999, p. 62).

Creating professional learning communities has many entry points. Activities that potentially lay the groundwork include developing a project requiring joint work to improve instruction, supporting a joint study on topics of mutual interest so teachers learn together and talk about their learning, implementing an innovative structure or curriculum so teachers build on one another’s skills, abilities, and subject-matter expertise (Langer, 2004; Lieberman & Miller, 1999; McLaughlin & Talbert, 2006).

Langer (2004) asserts that effective schools

- “Give teachers **opportunities and support** to originate ideas, try things out, and follow them through
- Keep teachers and administrators **actively involved** in joint review, development, and decision making about curriculum and instruction” (p. 26).
- “Treat faculty as a **learning community**
- Provide opportunities for **faculty to share** what they’ve been learning and **let the students in** on it, too
- Help **new ideas become part of the whole-school discourse**” (p. 28).

Collaborative Work Environment

Conditions that need to be in place to implement collaborative working environments include

- **time** for teacher relationships to develop, to do the joint work, and to sustain the effort
- **trust** to discuss values, differences in approaches and understanding and trust to accept and respect that there are multiple perspectives

- a norm of open **professional work discussions** that are “thoughtful, explicit examination of practices and their consequences” (Little, 1990, in Evans-Stout, 1998, p. 131)
- **tenacity to stay the course** to allow change to occur and new practices to be institutionalized
- **interactions that are deep discussions** of practice, values, instructional methods, and conceptions of learning. “Teachers become both autonomous and interdependent -- or individually different while mutually dependent” (Little, 1990, in Evans-Stout, 1998, p. 131).

The *Leading for Learning* sourcebook provides practical suggestions for implementing professional communities that reinforce ideas mentioned above. Leaders are advised to undertake these tasks:

1. **“Building trusting relationships among professionals in the school or district.** By valuing others, displaying empathy, and dealing forthrightly with colleagues, leaders help set a tone of mutual trust and respect in their institutions.”
2. **“Creating structures and schedules that sustain interaction among professionals.** Leaders set the stage for professional learning community by grouping [staff] in ways that encourage collaboration with each other over time ... and by creating regular blocks of time for them to interact.”
3. **“Helping to frame joint work and shared responsibilities...”** (p. 25).
4. **“Modeling, guiding, and facilitating participation in professional communities that value learning...** (e.g., through questioning, setting norms, sharing intellectual resources).”
5. **“Promoting a focus on learning and associated core values.** Leaders’ own persistent, public focus on learning and commitment to underlying values... give direction to the professional communities in which they participate” (Knapp, et al., 2003, p. 26).

Looking at student work is a strategy that both promotes and depends on effective collaboration and communication to improve student learning. There are several protocols for collaborative review of student work. Various approaches appear on the Looking at Student Work website.¹³ Collaborative Analysis of Student Learning (CASL) is “a teacher development system that helps educators develop a culture for collaborative inquiry and gain a deeper understanding of the link between their instruction and their students’ learning around a standards-based target learning area” (Langer, Colton, & Goff, 2003, p. 3). CASL focuses on student work, engages teachers in the study of selected students’ learning over a period of time, and creates a culture of collaboration focused on a cycle of inquiry. It also documents teacher and student learning. The approach is discussed on page 101.

¹³ <http://www.lasw.org/protocol.html/>

Family, Community, and School Collaboration and Communication

Collaboration and communication are essential in the broader context of school and community. **Two-way, regular, clear communication** is fundamental in high-performing schools. Student learning is enhanced when schools, families, and communities share goals, demonstrate mutual respect and trust, and join in partnerships to promote the well-being of students. Families and communities should be **invited to participate in school affairs at all levels**: governance, planning, program development, and implementation. Schools and districts engage families and communities in supporting student learning, making important decisions about students and schools, and sharing in the hard work of school improvement.

A first step toward effective communication and collaboration is recognizing the importance of “listening to the public and creating dialogue,” according to Wagner (2005) who calls the learning community the “new village commons” (p. 147). In *Making the Grade*, Wagner encourages schools and communities to join together to increase “social capital” necessary for helping students and families meet the challenges they often face.

Constantino (2005) also stresses the importance of communication in school community partnerships. He suggests that family members and schools “**communicate regularly and clearly** about information important to student success. Schools should inform families about standards and how they relate to the curriculum, learning objectives, methods of assessment, school programs, discipline codes, and student progress” (p. 152). He also suggests a **variety of means** for implementing communication, e.g., newsletters, handbooks, conferences, open houses, home visits, hotlines, Internet, e-mail, and voice mail. In-person contact and telephone calls are most effective for two-way communication to occur. He also emphasizes the need for language translations to be available whenever needed.

The *Leading for Learning* sourcebook suggests the importance of building relationships with individuals and groups, of opening lines of communications, developing alliances and coalitions for improving student learning, among other strategies (Knapp, et al., 2003). The concept “High level of family and community involvement” is discussed in more detail starting on page 119.

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5. Curriculum, instruction and assessments aligned with state standards

The planned and actual curricula are aligned with the essential academic learning requirements (EALRs). Research-based teaching strategies and materials are used. Staff understands the role of classroom and state assessments, what the assessments measure, and how student work is evaluated.

Definition and explanation

Alignment of curriculum, instruction, and assessment adds coherence and effectiveness to teaching and learning processes. Alignment is defined as the match between **what is to be learned** (the planned curriculum based on learning standards), **what is actually taught** (instruction), and **what and how it is tested** (assessment). Deeply aligning the content, context, and cognitive demand of the curriculum, instruction, and assessment impacts student learning. The match between what is taught and tested with the state standards is critical; however, effective instruction has the greatest influence on achievement. Therefore, this section discusses concepts and approaches to effective instruction and assessment, as well as the process of alignment. In addition, alignment of grading practices in a standards-based system is addressed.

Research studies from the past twenty years or so indicate that the matching (alignment) of testing content and curriculum content is highly significant in explaining improved test scores (Cohen, 1987; Fenwick & Steffy, 2001). This research also supports **aligning the curriculum and tests as a means for leveling the “playing field”** for poor students and students of color (Fenwick & Steffy, 2001).

Cohen’s research (1987) reports that “instructional alignment” (matching instruction and assessment) resulted in the “4 to 1 Effect.” He explains that the effect sizes exceeded “one and often two sigma or about four times” what usually occurs in typical classrooms (p. 19). A more recent study of a comprehensive alignment process, which included professional development, aligning curriculum, and filling the gaps, revealed “desirable gains despite the traditional predictors of poor student achievement” (Moss-Mitchell, 1998, p. 96, cited in Fenwick & Steffy).

Deep curriculum alignment, as defined by English and Steffy, explains how to go **beyond matching the content topics** of the curriculum, instruction, and assessment to a deeper level of alignment. While matching the content is a critical first step, instruction must also match the **cognitive demand in the standards** required of students and on which they will be tested. Another consideration for deep curriculum alignment is to match the **context (instructional conditions**, or that which is supplied to students, and **tasks** required of students) between the curriculum, instruction, and assessment. In Figure 2, the components of alignment are depicted with a triangle to illustrate the connections between **curriculum**, in Washington based on the Essential Academic Learning Requirements and Grade Level Expectations; **instruction** including pedagogy and use of instructional resources; and **assessment** using multiple measures of learning.

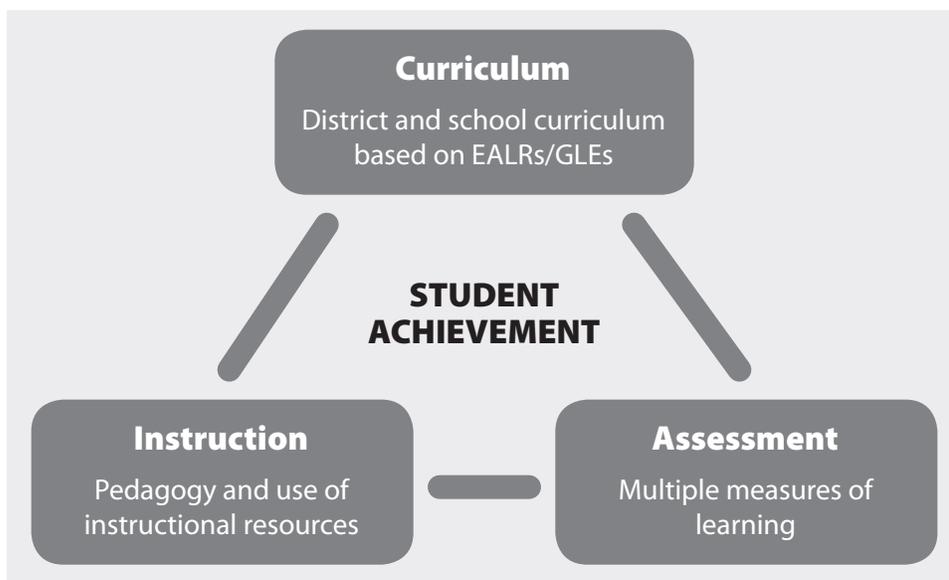


Figure 2: Components of Alignment

An **aligned system increases equity and excellence for students** when (1) learning standards or targets are known, (2) sufficient opportunities are provided to learn them, (3) instruction is focused on the targets, (4) assessments match the content of the learning standards, and (5) assessment formats are familiar. Fenwick and Steffy call this the “doctrine of no surprises” (p. 88).

In a standards-based system, the learning standards identify the subject knowledge and skills students are expected to learn. In Washington, learning standards are articulated in the Essential Academic Learning Requirements (EALRs) and Grade Level Expectations (GLEs). The **curriculum is the subject matter** through which students gain knowledge and skills and includes concepts, principles, theories, and organizational frameworks of the content areas. Although textbooks and other instructional materials are tools for teaching the curriculum, they do not constitute the curriculum. Assessments, matched to the learning standards, provide multiple ways for students to demonstrate what they know.

Understanding and implementing the **principles of learning** are foundational to alignment. Also, schools and teachers must provide high quality curriculum and instruction that are rigorous and culturally responsive. Cultural responsiveness should be embedded in the three aspects of effective classrooms--curriculum, instruction, and assessment.

Classroom instruction is “where the rubber hits the road.” Changes in classroom practice are critical in order to increase student learning. Researchers have noted that education reform too often has stopped at the classroom door. For example, Schmoker (2006) writes, “(W)e know two things that constitute a truly historic opportunity for better schools:

1. Instruction itself has the largest influence on achievement (a fact still dimly acknowledged).
2. Most (though not all) instruction, despite our best intentions, is not effective but could improve significantly and swiftly through ordinary and accessible arrangements among teachers and administrators” (p. 10).

Several assessment and school improvement experts assert that **grading and grade reporting** should be **aligned** in a standards-based system. They emphasize that the purpose of grading is communicating student learning; and, therefore, grading must communicate the learning accurately. According to research, grading has no value as punishment. **Reducing a grade** for absences, tardiness, or an infraction of the rules is **inconsistent** with standards-based learning. Also, grading and reporting should always be done in reference to learning criteria, never “on the curve” (Guskey, 1996, p. 18). If the students learned the content or met standards, their grades and report cards should reflect their learning and not reflect other personal or classroom topics, such as behavior, attitude, or ability (Guskey, 1996; O’Connor, 2005; Stiggins, 2005).

Implementation suggestions

Educators individually and collaboratively must engage in professional dialogue and curriculum development to create a comprehensive, deeply aligned system. This section offers ideas for improving curriculum, instruction, and assessment for learning. Suggestions for grading and reporting in a standards-based system conclude this section and also are discussed on page 90.

Alignment

Several steps are required for aligning curriculum, instruction, and assessment:

1. **Unpack the essential academic learning requirements.** Educators must analyze the standards to ensure they understand the knowledge and skills that students are required to learn. OSPI provides Grade Level Expectations for each subject area to explain and develop the Essential Academic Learning Requirements. In examining the structure of the Grade Level Expectations (GLEs), educators will be able to identify both the **content** and the **cognitive**

demand in the GLE statement. The Evidence of Learning statements provide educators with strong examples of **student tasks** that will demonstrate proficiency on the GLE. The Evidence of Learning statements are not exhaustive, and educators are encouraged to provide students with many opportunities to practice and demonstrate their learning in a variety of contexts to be certain they align with the content and cognitive demand required in the GLE. Educators need to begin with the GLEs and review grade level responsibility to ensure that the content is taught and reviewed sufficiently in a coherent and developmental fashion.

2. **Review the match** or fit of the actual “curriculum-in-use” with “tests-in-use.” Educators need to analyze the match between the assessments that are used, including state, district and classroom-based tests, and the “curriculum-in-use,” which are the essential learnings and GLEs, also called learning standards in some resources. The test specifications for large-scale assessments are an important resource as they provide teachers with a deeper understanding of the knowledge and skills required by the tests, including vocabulary and types of questions.
3. **Infuse assessments into instruction.** This is a critical step so teachers, and students themselves, know how proficient students are in the content. Using this information, teachers can plan and adjust lessons and units accordingly. Varied and appropriate assessment approaches must be used to meet different learning purposes and to increase student experience with a range of testing methods. The development and use of **common formative assessments** by content or grade-level teaching teams provide a basis for comparative analysis to determine the efficacy of instruction and to identify next steps to fill any gaps in learning.
4. **Determine the match of textbooks and supplemental instructional materials** and activities with the learning targets. Educators must systematically check instructional materials against the essential learnings and GLEs. Simply following textbook suggestions does not guarantee coherent programs of curriculum and instruction. Where textbooks do not match, additional supplementary materials must be obtained. Schools and districts may use the *Washington State Guidance for Selection of Instructional Materials to Meet District and State Standards* (2007). The document suggests procedures and helpful hints for successful adoption of materials, including potential obstacles in the process, and it also identifies resources.
5. **Evaluate and align** curriculum by filling any identified gaps in the taught curriculum and reduce undue repetition or redundant content.
6. **Identify effective instructional methods** for teaching both basic and advanced skills and their application through ongoing review of professional and research literature. Instruction includes not only the “what” but the “how” of instructional practice that will enable students to reach the **cognitive demand** level in state standards. Staff need to work together in implementing these methods.

7. **Provide teachers the opportunity** to hone their skills through school-based ongoing professional development.
8. **Give students sufficient opportunities** to learn the content and to demonstrate their knowledge and skills through a variety of classroom-based **formative** assessments FOR learning.

Curriculum

Curriculum mapping is one approach to assist teachers in the collaborative review of curriculum, instruction, and assessment for alignment purposes. Curriculum mapping improves the connections or coherence in content vertically from grade to grade. The process also can increase consistency across grades within a school or across a district.

Districts may develop and implement a system-wide approach to curriculum planning through curriculum mapping activities, which delineate scope and sequence for the district, with teacher representation from all schools. Even with a system-wide effort, however, some level of curriculum mapping and articulation should occur at the school level to capture aspects of specific implementation of the curriculum.

Also, developing a school curriculum map promotes **professional communication and collaboration** to improve student learning. A map makes the taught curriculum clear and public so that the faculty can analyze and make decisions to find and fill omissions or gaps and to reveal and eliminate unnecessary redundancies, such as teaching the same novel or topic (e.g., dinosaurs) several years in a row.

A practical **process for mapping** includes these steps:

1. Teachers individually **identify what they are currently teaching**. In many schools teachers may know little about what others are teaching. Teachers “map” the actual content taught according to the school calendar. A complete map will include essential learning requirements, grade level expectations, curriculum content knowledge and skills, instructional materials, assessments, and estimated length of time for instruction. These latter elements can be added as the maps are more fully developed during the process.
2. Teachers **share their original individual maps** with the whole faculty. (If the district has a system-wide curriculum framework, teachers must link their maps to it.)
3. The **whole faculty reviews** the maps looking for **any gaps in content and skills and for redundancies**, examining in particular the information within grade levels and across grade level maps. When revisions are needed, some changes can be made immediately; others will require long-term research and development.
4. Faculty members work together to identify **effective instructional methods** for teaching the content and skills and to **create classroom and school-based assessments** that are used in monitoring progress of student learning and making day-to-day instructional decisions.

The curriculum map provides an **overall picture** that also is helpful when teachers want to integrate instruction around concepts and themes. **Essential overarching questions** to guide instruction can be generated from the maps. Maps are dynamic and continuously reviewed and revised (Jacobs, 1997).

Curriculum Planning Processes

Many curriculum development approaches are available. In the following section, three processes illustrate important aspects of curriculum planning; these are *Understanding by Design*, *Unwrapping Standards* and *Power Standards*, and *Universal Design for Learning*.

In *Understanding by Design*, McTighe and Wiggins (1998) provide a framework for planning curriculum units, lessons, and even programs, using “backward design” or beginning with the “end in mind.” The planning sequence includes three stages:

1. “Identify desired results
2. Determine acceptable evidence
3. Plan learning experiences and instruction.”

In order to identify desired results, McTighe and Wiggins pose three questions that educators must consider:

1. “What should students know, understand, and be able to do?
2. What is worthy of understanding?
3. What enduring understandings are desired?” (p. 9).

The authors frame several key questions that are needed in backward design of curriculum:

- “What enabling knowledge (facts, concepts, and principles) and skills (procedures) will students need to perform effectively and achieve desired results?
- What activities will equip students with the needed knowledge and skills?
- What will need to be taught and coached, and how should it best be taught, in light of performance goals?
- What materials and resources are best suited to accomplish these goals?
- Is the overall design coherent and effective” (p. 13).

McTighe and Wiggins have developed design criteria that help ensure high-quality units. The acronym **WHERE** captures the components:

- **“Where are we headed?”** Including assessments and criteria for evaluating the work
- **“Hook the student through engaging and provocative entry points”** – focusing experiences, issues, challenges, etc. that point to essential questions
- **“Explore the subject and equip the student”** – engaging students in experiences that allow them to explore big ideas, research and test ideas, “experience the ideas to make them real”

- **“Reflect and rethink”** – digging deeper into the ideas, revise, rehearse, and refine as needed. Help students to self-assess
- **“Exhibit and evaluate results”** – “reveal(ing) what has been understood through final performances and products...identify remaining questions, set future goals, and point toward new units and lessons” (p. 116).

According to an implementation study of the *Understanding by Design* framework, educators who work with the framework report the value and usefulness of the components and offer suggestions for implementation as a school improvement strategy. In some schools and districts, the framework is a means for broad curriculum development, beyond unit design, and influences instruction and supports school improvement (Brown, 2004).

“Unwrapping” Standards is another planning approach, developed by Ainsworth (2003b). Through this process, educators can make learning standards more manageable. The process includes **“unwrapping” standards** and identifying **“power” standards**, which are over-arching or big idea standards that can be used for organizing learning standards. Ainsworth defines power standards as those that matter most for students. They are high priority because “they represent the **‘safety net’ of standards** each teacher needs to make sure that every student learns prior to leaving the current grade” (2003a, p. 22). Power standards meet the following criteria:

- “What [students] need to know and be able to do in school this year, next year, and so on?”
- What [students] need to learn in the way of life skills?
- What [students] need to know and be able to do on all high-stakes district and state assessments?” (2003a, p. 22).

Ainsworth explains that this process reflects good teaching as educators are “deciding what is important for students to learn in a particular content area (‘unwrapping’), helping students make connections to other areas of study and utilize higher-level thinking skills (Big Ideas), and engaging students in the material to be studied by setting a purpose for learning (Essential Questions)” (p. 2). Ainsworth’s manual explains the steps in the process: identify the important concepts and skills contained within the standards; arrange them on a graphic organizer; identify the lasting understandings, or Big Ideas, within the concepts and skills; write Essential Questions to use as “instructional filters” for planning lessons. “The final goal is for students to be able to use their own words in answering the Essential Questions with the Big Ideas...” (p. 3).

Universal Design for Learning (UDL) is an inclusive approach for designing curriculum that fosters access to learning for everyone. Adapted from the fields of architecture and product development, the features of UDL are designed to benefit everyone as barriers to learning are identified and removed. The approach calls for building-in, at the design stage, “access for a wide range of [learners], those with and without disabilities.” This is the “underlying principle of universal design” (Orkwis, 1999). Technologies can help facilitate meeting student learning needs. General and special

education teachers need to collaborate to design appropriate curriculum and instruction using the approach. The Center for Applied Special Technology (CAST), one of the groups working on universal design issues, provides materials and training for implementation of the framework.¹⁴ The **UDL curriculum framework**

1. “Represents information in multiple formats and media.
2. Provides multiple pathways for students’ actions and expressions.
3. Provides multiple ways to engage students’ interests and motivation” (Rose, 2002, in Council for Exceptional Children, 2005, p. 4).

Thus, universal design for learning “provides a framework for teachers to ensure that instructional strategies, curricula, and assessment are appropriate for a variety of learners.” The practices “promote curriculum flexibility, varied instructional methods, and appropriate assessments that consider learners’ diverse needs and prepare them to advance under the general curriculum” (p. 4).

Office of Superintendent of Public Instruction resources

The Office of Superintendent of Public Instruction (OSPI) produced several documents that are useful in developing and aligning curriculum and improving instruction and assessment.

The **Reading program** staff at OSPI, reading experts, and other educators in the state developed the K12 Reading Model using a three-tiered approach to reading instruction that addresses specific learner needs. The *K-12 Reading Model Implementation Guide* (2005)¹⁵ advocates a systemic approach to reading instruction and addresses five critical and interrelated areas: Standards, Assessments, Instruction and Intervention, Leadership and System-wide commitment (SAILS). The model calls for **developing action plans** that address the five essential components of effective reading instruction (phonemic awareness, phonics, fluency, vocabulary, and comprehension), four types of assessments (screening, progress monitoring, diagnostics, and outcome), and **organizing the tiers of instruction** aligned with the content standards, the EALRs and GLEs. At the “heart of the...model is effective use of progress monitoring formative assessments” (p. 39).

The three tiers—described as a “flexible service model” (p. 7) rather than a placement plan—include the core and content areas (Tier I, which includes the majority of learners), strategic instruction (Tier II, which serves a smaller percentage), and intensive intervention (Tier III, which serves the most struggling readers). Over time, the numbers of students in Tiers II and III are expected to shrink while students performing successfully will grow. The approach is thought to be “far more effective than seeking one ‘best’ instructional program and expecting it to improve student reading achievement” (p. 1).

¹⁴ <http://www.cast.org/>

¹⁵ <http://www.k12.wa.us/CurriculumInstruct/Reading/default.aspx>

The **Special Education program** at OSPI produced a manual entitled *Using Response to Intervention (RTI) for Washington's Students* (2006),¹⁶ in response to legislation in the Individuals with Disabilities Education Improvement Act of 2004. The manual can support districts and schools in the use of effective educational practices to ensure high quality instruction for all students. The concepts presented in the manual provide a framework that incorporates principles to **personalize education** through the use of a **multi-tiered approach** for academic and behavioral instruction, which intentionally parallels the three-tiers in the reading model.

RTI moves from general education to progressively more targeted and intense intervention for the students with most need. RTI practices are “proactive, incorporating both prevention and intervention and [are] effective at all levels from early childhood through high school” (p. 2). The underlying purposes of RTI are to provide students with **high quality instruction** and to **provide intervention as soon as the need arises**. Seven core principles include

1. Use all available resources to teach all students
2. Use scientific, research-based interventions/instruction
3. Monitor classroom performance
4. Conduct universal screening/benchmarking – in all core academic areas and behavior
5. Use a multi-tier model of service delivery
6. Make data-based decisions
7. Monitor progress frequently.

The **Migrant and Bilingual Education** staff at OSPI developed several resources to assist schools and districts. The *English Language Development Content Standards* and *Instructional Materials Review* are available to help schools and districts improve student learning and to identify superior instructional materials for English Language Learners in grades 6 through 12. The reports suggest a starting point for districts to consider how best to develop language instructional programs that increase English proficiency of English language learners.¹⁷

Three professional development models and techniques can help teachers of English language learners develop their students' language proficiency skills. These are Guided Language Acquisition Design (Project GLAD), Sheltered Instruction (SI), and Sheltered Instruction Observation Protocol (SIOP). These are described briefly on page 103.

16 <http://www.k12.wa.us/SpecialEd/RTI.aspx>

17 <http://www.k12.wa.us/MigrantBilingual/ELD.aspx> and <http://www.k12.wa.us/MigrantBilingual/TitleIII.aspx>

Effective Instruction

To improve student learning, educators need to know their content, to understand the dimensions and principles of learning, and have the ability to implement effective strategies and appropriate structures for improving student learning. Many strategies are appropriate across content areas and grade levels.

Instruction consists of the **“interactions” among teachers and students around content within a specific context** or environment. Cohen, Raudenbush, and Ball (2003) stress that “instruction is a **stream, not an event**, and it flows and draws on environments—including other teachers and students, school leaders, parents, professionals, local districts, state agencies, and test and text publishers.” They also state that “(i)nstruction evolves as tasks develop and lead to others, as students’ engagement and understanding waxes and wanes and organization changes” (p. 122).

The teacher and quality of teaching affect student achievement (e.g., Carey, 2004; Darling-Hammond & Youngs, 2002; Rice, 2003; & Wayne & Youngs, 2003). Teachers are most effective when their instruction is tightly “focused on the learning needs of each student.” This requires knowing the strengths and weaknesses of each student, knowing the “appropriate instructional response” and when and how to use it, and “having classroom structures, routines, and tools to deliver differentiated instruction and focused teaching on a daily basis” (Fullan, Hill, & Crevola, 2006, p. 33).

As Langer (2004) asserts, “(I)t takes a knowledgeable professional faculty to become familiar with what particular instruction to offer to students, how to know when each is needed or not, and what is most helpful to which students and when” (p. 51). Teacher strengths and preparation, therefore, must be considered when class assignments are made. Some studies emphasize the importance of assigning the students with the greatest need to the most skillful teachers. More ideas for honing knowledge and skills to improve instruction are discussed on page 96.

Frameworks to guide teaching

Frameworks identify the essential components, attributes, and behaviors of effective teachers and teaching. These frameworks can help educators analyze and increase their professional knowledge and skills. *Washington State Professional Development Planning Guide IN ACTION: Linking Professional Development to Improved Student Learning* (2005) and *Enhancing Professional Practice: A Framework for Teaching* (Danielson, 1996/2007) are two such frameworks. These materials identify critical elements and include rubrics to help teachers and others reflect on teaching practices and identify strengths and challenges. Other organizations also have developed teaching standards.¹⁸ These frameworks reflect some commonalities related to developing professional expertise. The Danielson framework is used to illustrate. It identifies

¹⁸ Standards for beginning teacher competencies have been developed by Interstate New Teacher Assessment and Support Consortium (INTASC); the National Association of State Directors of Teacher Education and Certification (NASDTEC); and the National Council for Accreditation of Teacher Education (NCATE). The National Teaching Standards Board (NTSB) provides a framework for evaluating advanced teaching performance in various content areas.

four **domains** of teaching responsibilities:

1. Planning and Preparation
2. The Classroom Environment
3. Instruction
4. Professional Responsibilities.

The domains include components, which are further broken into elements. In the domain of *instruction*, for example, the **components** include

- communicating with students
- using questioning and discussion techniques
- engaging students in learning
- using assessment in instruction
- demonstrating flexibility and responsiveness.

Under the domain of *instruction* and within the component *engaging students in learning*, the **elements** include

- activities and assignments
- grouping of students
- instructional materials and resources
- structure and pacing.

The framework includes rubrics for each element of the components and domains with criteria for unsatisfactory, basic, proficient, and distinguished levels of performance. The rubrics help to operationalize concepts of teaching practice. Of course, the domains, components, and elements are not really as discrete as they appear in these separate lists. “Teaching is a holistic endeavor; all the different aspects of teaching are entangled in multiple ways” (p. 31). However, the framework provides a useful tool that can be applied in preparing beginning teachers, in professional development for experienced educators, and, importantly, in self-reflection as it offers common terms and understandings of the complexities of teaching.

Dimensions and principles of learning

Effective instruction and appropriate assessments, reflecting **principles of learning**, are needed to help students learn the Essential Academic Learning Requirements and Grade Level Expectations and to meet the performance standards. Research is increasing our knowledge regarding how people learn, and some principles that support learning have been synthesized from various studies. Learning with understanding, using pre-existing knowledge, and taking control of one’s own learning or active learning, are key concepts from the “new science of learning” (Bransford, Brown, & Cocking, 2000).

Optimal individual learning at all ages includes the following **key dimensions**, according to Murphy and Alexander (2006):

- *Learner development*: “Learning, ultimately a unique adventure for all, progresses through various common stages of development influenced by both inherited and experiential environmental factors.”
- *Knowledge and understanding*: “One’s existing knowledge serves as the foundation of all future learning by guiding organization and representations, by serving as a basis of association with new information, and by coloring and filtering all new experience.”
- *Learner motivation and affect*: “Motivation or affective factors, such as intrinsic motivation, personal goals, attributions for learning, and self-efficacy, along with the motivational characteristics of learning tasks, play a significant role in the learning process.”
- *Strategies and regulating learning*: “The ability to reflect upon and regulate one’s thoughts and behaviors is essential to learning and development.”
- *Shared learning*: “Learning is as much a socially shared undertaking as it is an individually constructed enterprise” (p. 10-13).

Instruction that builds on the following **principles** is likely to increase student learning:

- **Constructing knowledge**—learners are active participants in the learning process using their prior knowledge and experiences
- **Active engagement**—learners respond to having a choice, time to reflect, opportunities to participate in decisions about their work, express learning in a variety of ways, do something with what they learn, and have some open-ended experiences or “mystery” in their learning, rather than encountering only predetermined results
- **Meaningful content**—students make connections with the content; content is personally relevant
- **Collaboration and social interaction**—students work together, teach one another, converse about their learning
- **Reflection / Self-Assessment / Metacognition**—students are aware of their thinking processes and how to regulate the processes by monitoring and directing the process and making adjustments when something isn’t working
- **Inclusivity**—students feel valued and welcomed in classrooms; they need teachers who believe in them and expect them to do well (NWREL, School Improvement Program).

Standards and practices of effective instruction

Educational experts offer suggestions for increasing the effectiveness of classroom instruction; some of their ideas are included below to illustrate a range of approaches to improving practice. In addition, culturally relevant classroom practices are necessary to improve student learning across racial, ethnic, and socioeconomic groups.

Standards for authentic pedagogy. Authentic pedagogy, which includes both instruction and assessment, characterizes effective classrooms, according to research conducted by Newmann and Wehlage (1995). They found that instruction that **emphasizes intellectual quality** includes **construction of knowledge**, disciplined **inquiry** and **value beyond school**. These important components, or standards, for instruction and assessment increase student achievement across student groups. Research over years has shown that authentic classroom assignments, interactive teaching, and strong social support in the classroom together lead to higher standardized test scores.

Instruction in effective schools. Based on extensive research on schools, Langer (2004) describes the qualities of instruction found in effective schools. “Schools that work well teach students **strategies for thinking about and using the content they study**.... (S)tudents develop deeper understandings, a mind-set for how to get the job done” (p. 46).

In these schools, teachers

- “Aim to help students build a network of concepts and understandings, and to use them in new contexts
- Leave time to help students clarify their understandings
- Encourage ‘minds on’ the topic through engaging activities (e.g., critiques, research, predicting effects and outcomes)
- Guide students to examine alternatives, form their own perspectives, and develop well-founded arguments about issues they are learning
- Aim for generative learning, where students are challenged to use skills and knowledge in new ways
- Help students connect what they are learning to larger issues in the discipline, their lives, and the world” (p. 46).

Teachers also

- “Teach students strategies for how to think about as well as how to carry through assignments and activities”
- “Offer instructional apprenticeships—with models, guides, prompts, reminders, and other helpful support”
- “Teach students strategies for how to judge their understandings as well as the effectiveness of the work they do” (p. 48)
- “Use a variety of instructional approaches flexibly, based on students’ learning needs; don’t rely excessively on one approach” (p. 51)
- “Allow students ample opportunity to try things out, ask questions, receive help, and judge their own performance” regardless of instructional approach (p. 51)
- “Treat ‘getting it’ as groundwork to teach deeper understandings” (p. 52).

Instructional strategies and structures

Researchers suggest instructional strategies, practices, and structures that can be applied across content areas and grade levels. Adaptive pedagogy and culturally responsive teaching include some of these strategies and structures and also suggest additional ways of supporting students.

Research-based instructional strategies. Marzano, Pickering, and Pollock (2001) identify strategies that have potential to increase student learning based on extensive research, which include

- identifying similarities and differences
- summarizing and note taking
- reinforcing effort and providing recognition
- homework and practice
- nonlinguistic representations
- cooperative learning
- setting objectives and providing feedback
- generating and testing hypotheses
- cues, questions, and organizers.

Hill and Flynn (2006) adapt this set of instructional strategies from Marzano, Pickering, and Pollock for use with English language learners and provide suggestions for implementation of each in their recent book *Classroom Instruction that Works with English Language Learners*.

Effective instructional structures. Zemelman, Daniels, and Hyde (2005) identify structures that support and encourage active learning. These basic ways of **organizing students, time, materials**, and so on can be adapted to most content areas and grade levels. These structures have a “robust literature of how-to’s and implementation guides...” (p. 228). They require explicit training of students to be effective; however, the training helps students develop habits of mind and social skills that are good foundations for future learning. These “methods that matter” include

- Small Group Activities
- Reading as Thinking
- Representing to Learn
- Classroom Workshop
- Authentic Experiences
- Reflective Assessment
- Integrative Units.

Adaptive pedagogy. Darling-Hammond (2002) suggests strategies for supporting individual student learning. Adaptive pedagogy, developed by psychologist Robert Glaser, is a concept that **shifts teaching from a narrow approach**, characterized by

minimal variation in methods, to an **approach that calls for a greater range of opportunities** for success. Adaptive pedagogy is “adjusted to individuals—their backgrounds, talents, interests, and the nature of past performance” (p. 27). Examples that support student learning include

- Multiple instructional strategies, ranging from traditional strategies to projects, experiments, internet research, constructions of models and products, use of technology and the arts, short-term as well as long-term projects
- Group work with substantial scaffolding as needed with active teacher coaching and assistance
- Explicit teaching of academic skills—particularly in high school teaching when too often assumptions are made that students have mastered advanced skills
- Scaffolding—for example, lead students through the steps of a process, explicitly teach students how to study, how to attack academic work
- Culture of revision and redemption—encourages students to attempt challenging work and builds confidence in students to work to improve through their “successive efforts”
- Extra support
- Strong relationships—providing longer teaching blocks, fewer courses or lower pupil loads so teachers and students develop “caring relationships” (p. 27).

Cultural responsiveness and cultural competence. Knowledge related to various cultures and the need for responsive teaching are foundational to the successful learning of all students. Gay (2000) contends that “(c)ulturally responsive teaching makes **academic success a non-negotiable mandate** for all students and an accessible goal...It does not pit academic success and cultural affiliation against each other. Rather, academic success and cultural consciousness are developed simultaneously. Students are taught to be proud of their ethnic identities and cultural backgrounds instead of being apologetic or ashamed of them” (p. 34).

Gay provides the following characteristics of culturally responsive teaching:

- “It acknowledges the legitimacy of the cultural heritages of different ethnic groups, both as legacies that affect students’ dispositions, attitudes, and approaches to learning and as worthy content to be taught in the formal curriculum.
- It builds bridges of meaningfulness between home and school experiences as well as between academic abstractions and lived sociocultural realities.
- It uses a wide variety of instructional strategies that are connected to different learning styles.
- It teaches students to know and praise their own and each others’ cultural heritages.
- It incorporates multicultural information, resources, and materials in all the subjects and skills routinely taught in schools” (p. 29).

According to research, “effective teachers of students of color—who include white teachers as well as members of minority groups...” do the following:

- “link classroom content to students’ experiences”
- “focus on the whole child”
- “believe that all of their students can succeed”
- “use an active, direct approach to teaching: demonstrating, modeling, explaining, writing, giving feedback, reviewing”
- “emphasiz(e) higher-order skills while avoiding excessive reliance on rote learning or punishment”
- “see the teacher-student relationship as humane and equitable, and characterized by a sense of community and team”
- “emphasize cooperation rather than competition and feature cooperative learning strategies and student-initiated discourse and participation” (Irvine, 1992; Ladson-Billings, 1994; Garcia, 1993; in Banks, Cochran-Smith, Moll, Richert, Zeichner, LePage, Darling-Hammond, & Duffy, 2005, p. 245).

Other researchers point out that students of color and students in poverty benefit from excellent teaching practices that support all students. In brief, instructional strategies that are often reserved for gifted and talented classes serve diverse students well. Cooperative learning, cognitively-guided instruction, instructional conversations or dialogue, open-ended questioning, inductive and analytical reasoning, and positive interpersonal relationships are among characteristics and effective strategies reported by Demmert (2001), McKinley (2005), and Padron, Waxman, and Rivera (2002).

Assessment

Assessments also must align with the learning targets and the purposes for which the assessments will be used. There are principles, methodologies, and assessment tools that guide appropriate classroom assessment. Assessments serve both formative and summative purposes; in other words assessment **for** learning and assessment **of** learning (Stiggins, 2005). Rubrics or scoring guides are effective tools for helping teachers and students clarify the learning standards and quality of student work. They generally describe the attributes of student work at each level on a continuum from excellent to poor.

McTighe and Wiggins (1998) offer a **continuum of assessment methods** that may be used to determine acceptable evidence of learning. Identification of the assessments and methods are integral to curriculum design and instruction; therefore, this is an early step in the planning process. The authors stress that evidence includes formal and informal assessments that occur during the teaching, not only summative or culminating assessments. As such, these include informal checks for understanding, observation and dialogue, traditional quizzes and tests, academic prompts, performance tasks and projects, and students’ self assessment. “Assessments should be thought of in terms of a collection of evidence over time....” (p. 12-13).

“**Best practices**” for assessing student learning, suggested by Zemelman, Daniels, and Hyde (2005), include the following:

- assessments focus on **key knowledge and on complex learning and performances** of writing, reading, researching, and problem solving, rather than only on isolated subskills
- assessments are, most of the time, **formative, not summative**—the data is then used to guide individual students’ further learning and to adjust teaching
- **evaluations are descriptive or narrative**, not only scored and numerical, so students better understand their own progress
- **students are included** in developing meaningful assessments and have responsibility to keep track of and judge their own work
- **assessments are “triangulated,”** that is, the learning of each child is looked at from several angles, “drawing on observation, conversation, artifacts, and performances, and by looking at learning over time”
- assessments are an **integral part of instruction**, rather than separate from it
- assessments are planned to take a “**moderate amount of time,**” so they do not take excessive instructional time or teacher attention
- assessments, whenever possible, **minimize or “abolish” competitive grading systems**
- a school “employs parent-education programs to **help community members understand** the value of new [assessment] approaches, and then invites parents to participate in the process” (p. 316).

Assessment methods include selected response, essay, performance assessment, and personal communication including observation (Stiggins, 1997, 2005). Some methods are most appropriate for classroom use; others work well for both classroom use and for large-scale tests. Stiggins outlines several principles for sound assessment and key decision points for planning and conducting appropriate assessment. This topic also is discussed on page 86.

Grading and Reporting Practices

In an era of high standards and accountability, grading and reporting practices warrant examination, review, and revision. In a truly coherent system, **grading and reporting practices must align with the principles of standards-based reform.**

Several assessment experts suggest ways that traditional grading and reporting fall short in reflecting “what students have learned, should be learning and what will be most helpful” (Glickman, 1993, p. 95). Determining grades through comparison of students to one another, for example, does not align with the expectation that all student learn to the high standards that are set for them. Rather, **grading and reporting** are more **appropriately linked to the criteria** identified in the essential academic learning requirements and grade level expectations.

Guskey (1996) summarizes several points about which researchers appear to agree:

1. “Grading and reporting are not essential to instruction.” Teachers need to check on students’ learning progress, but “checking is different from grading” (p. 16).
2. “No one method of grading and reporting serves all purposes well.” Since one method cannot serve all purposes, schools must identify their primary purpose for grading and reporting.
3. “Grading and reporting will always involve some degree of subjectivity” (p. 17).
4. “Grades have some value as rewards, but no value as punishments.” Using grades as a “weapon of last resort” on students who do not comply—lowering grades or giving a failing grade as punishment—“ha(s) no educational value and, in the long run, adversely effect(s) students, teachers, and the relationship they share” (p. 18).
5. Grading and reporting should always be done in reference to learning criteria, never “on the curve” (p. 18).

Research does not support the assumption that low grades motivate students to higher performance or greater effort. “Instead of prompting greater effort, low grades more often cause students to withdraw from learning” (Guskey, p. 25). Assessment experts also agree there should be **no rationing of high scores**, particularly in a standards-based system, and they often suggest “incompletes” are more appropriate than zeroes or Fs. If the purpose of grades is to communicate individual student achievement, grades also should never include other topics, such as behavior, absences, tardiness, attitude, and/or participation. Grading and reporting are also discussed on page 90.

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Washington State Guidance for Selection of Instructional Materials to meet District and State Standards

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- <http://www.aera.net/> American Educational Research Association
- <http://www.ncss.org/> National Council of Social Studies
- <http://www.ncte.org/> National Council of Teachers of English
- <http://www.reading.org/> International Reading Association
- <http://www.nctm.org/> National Council of Teachers of Mathematics
- <http://www.nsta.org/> National Science Teachers Association
- <http://www.tesol.org/> Teachers of English to Speakers of Other Languages
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6. Frequent monitoring of learning and teaching

A steady cycle of different assessments identify students who need help. More support and instructional time are provided, either during the school day or outside normal school hours, to students who need more help. Teaching is adjusted based on frequent monitoring of student progress and needs. Assessment results are used to focus and improve instructional programs.

Definition and explanation

Monitoring, broadly defined, is “**analyzing what we are doing against the results we are getting**” (Schmoker, 1996, p. 6). Monitoring requires regularly reviewing and refining the processes that most “directly contribute to designated results” (p. 7). Measures used in monitoring provide feedback to teacher and learner, as well as other stakeholders, who are responsible for making changes to ensure continual learning progress.

Monitoring teaching and learning requires paying attention both to student learning results and to the effectiveness of school and classroom procedures. **Learning is monitored by tracking a variety of assessment results** such as test scores, student developed products, performances, and other evidence of learning. **Teaching is monitored by supervisors for programs and teacher evaluation and by teachers themselves** as they reflect on their practices. Information about the **effectiveness of instructional processes**, educational programs, and materials is gathered from a variety of sources that reveal student learning, e.g., common assessments, instructional artifacts, observations, dialogue, examination of student work, and so on. Assessment results are used for planning instruction for individual students as well as for school-wide decision making and planning. Classroom and school practices are modified based on the data, i.e., from the **collections of evidence** of student learning.

Effective monitoring is **non-threatening** and **occurs frequently**. In other words, **monitoring provides continuous feedback primarily for purposes of improvement**, not for making major decisions about a student’s future or a teacher’s career. In a supportive school environment focused on continual improvement, feedback allows teachers to make procedural corrections, re-teach, and encourage student efforts, as well as to change their practices. “**Errors are treated as learning opportunities**, not

test failures, and should lead to additional instruction and practice opportunities.” Students should be given multiple opportunities to learn in order to encourage their persistence in overcoming initial failures (Good & Brophy, 2000, p. 229, 230). In her discussion of adaptive pedagogy, Darling-Hammond promotes the same idea when she calls for “a culture of revision and redemption” (2002, p. 27). Other experts also support the idea that students’ “practice work” does not need to be graded. Instead, students need to be supported and encouraged, with additional instruction and feedback, when they try new and more demanding work, not given “low marks” (Canady & Hotchkiss, 1989, in O’Connor, 2002, p. 38).

Communicating student achievement through effective grading and reporting practices is an aspect of monitoring learning and teaching. Providing students with information regarding their performance and providing them opportunities to assess their own learning help students to internalize learning standards and to take responsibility for their learning. Grading is difficult and complex (Guskey, 1996; Glickman, 1993; Stiggins, 2005; O’Connor, 2005; Wiggins, 1996; Zemelman, Daniels, & Hyde, 2005; and others). Many reporting systems are inadequate and often lead to confusion and misinterpretation. Some practices work to the detriment of students. *Communicating Student Learning* includes discussions on three critical issues related to grading and reporting:

1. “The primary goal of grading and reporting is *communication*. Regardless of the format, its purpose is to provide high-quality information to interested persons in a form they can understand and use effectively.
2. Reporting is an integral part of the learning process, much like assessment. It certifies where additional work is needed.
3. As the goals of schooling become more complex, the need for better quality and more detailed communication about student learning become increasingly important” (Guskey, 1996, p. 3).

Implementation suggestions

School districts, schools, and teachers need to develop **systems for gathering information on student learning and teaching practices** at the classroom and school levels. This evidence of student learning should be routinely collected and analyzed, and instructional methods and activities modified accordingly.

A number of school improvement experts provide **suggestions for using data to increase student learning**. Schmoker (1996) outlines an approach that can be relatively easily implemented and has potential to produce early results to “**jumpstart**” school improvement. He suggests these steps that capture some of the essential ideas in action research or inquiry:

- Teachers work in teams to determine a **baseline of student achievement in a goal area** using teacher-made and textbook published tests as well as data from school, district, and state tests.
- Teachers select an **instructional strategy and use** it in their classrooms.
- Teachers **assess student work** at relatively short intervals. These assessments

provide **immediate and ongoing feedback** on the effectiveness of the instructional strategy. Such **monitoring becomes motivating** as effective instruction improves learning. This progress creates “**zest**” or enthusiasm **for continuing the hard work** of improving student learning.

Formal and informal assessments are used for monitoring learning and teaching. Several authors provide helpful ideas regarding quality assessment standards and appropriate methods, involving students in assessment, and grading practices. Also, ideas are suggested for monitoring teaching practices and school improvement efforts.

Monitoring Student Learning

A variety of measurement methods and tools are available for **monitoring student learning** and providing evidence of student learning. **Methods that are used must match** the learning targets and the purposes for which the tests will be used. Several **reasons for measuring** student learning include

- Making sure students “do not fall through the cracks”
- Assessing individual or group achievement
- Diagnosing learning problems
- Certifying or graduating students
- Guiding curriculum development and revision
- Improving instruction
- Being accountable
- Understanding which programs are getting the results we want
- Knowing if we are achieving our standards
- Knowing how we compare to others in the nation (Bernhardt, 1998, p. 63).

Quality assessment standards, according to Stiggins (2005), include six criteria to ensure they produce accurate results:

1. “The intended user(s) and use(s) of the assessment are clear
2. The valued student learning target(s) are clear and appropriate
3. A proper assessment method has been selected
4. The assessment samples achievement using enough high-quality exercises and scoring procedures
5. Relevant sources of bias have been minimized
6. Results are communicated effectively” (p. 362-364).

Assessment methods include selected response, essay, performance assessment, and personal communication including observations, according to Stiggins (2005). Some methods are most appropriate for classroom use; others work well for large-scale tests; some methods can serve both purposes. Assessment methods must be matched with achievement targets and overall purposes. Targets include knowledge and understanding, reasoning proficiency, performance skills, ability to create products, and personal dispositions, e.g., attitudes, interests, and motivation.

Assessment development includes these **decision points**:

- Determining learning targets and purposes
- Selecting appropriate methods based on those
- Deciding the specifics of the assessment: who will be tested, what content will be tested, and what specific test methods are appropriate
- Developing test items
- Administering and scoring the assessments.

Sample **measurement tools** include

- classroom observations or anecdotal records
- portfolios of student work
- teacher-made tests and rubrics
- grades
- criterion-referenced measures (often developed by state, district, or textbook publishers)
- authentic and performance assessments
- norm referenced large-scale tests.

Assessment FOR learning. Of particular importance in school improvement is assessment FOR student learning, that is, formative assessments used to answer the question “Is the student progressing?” Assessment OF learning, which is summative assessment, answers the question “Have standards been mastered?” Summative assessments, therefore, are those used to determine students’ grades or final achievement levels (Stiggins, 2005, p. 236). Stiggins explains that assessments “must help us accurately diagnose students’ needs, track and enhance student growth toward standards, motivate students to strive for academic excellence, and verify student mastery of required standards” (p. 15), not just judge or sort students. Stiggins is also concerned about the effects of assessments and grades on students and their motivation to learn. He writes, “whatever else we do, we must help them believe that success in learning is possible for them and worthy of the effort” (p. 18). Educators must use “**assessment in support of learning--not merely as a gauge of learning.** It’s about assessment without victims” (p. 18).

Student-involved assessment. Students have a role in assessing and monitoring their own learning. Students’ involvement in assessment has potential to increase their understanding of the learning targets and to develop their ability to evaluate their own academic progress. “Students who participate in the thoughtful analysis of quality work to identify its critical elements or to internalize valued achievement targets become better performers. When students learn to apply these standards so thoroughly that they can confidently and competently evaluate their own and each other’s work, they are well on the road to becoming better performers in their own right” (Stiggins, p. 29).

Students also benefit from participating in conferences regarding their learning, both in one-on-one conferences with teachers and in student-parent-teacher conferences.

Stiggins (2005) and others provide guidance for, as well as the benefits of, student-led parent conferences. Successful three-way conferences require careful planning and preparation. “Students work to understand the vision of success, master the language needed to communicate about it, learn to describe their achievements, and evaluate their own strengths and weaknesses” (p. 352). These experiences increase effective engagement of students in their learning.

Scoring guides or rubrics are important instructional and assessment tools. Stiggins (2005) asserts, “Students can succeed if they know what it means to succeed” (p. 132). Rubrics explicitly provide the criteria for success. Stiggins advises, “State the meaning of success up front, design instruction to help students succeed, and devise and use assessments that reflect that vision of success.” Rubrics or scoring guides can be used for assessing essays, performances, and products.

Evidence of learning. Statements for evidence of student learning of the Grade Level Expectations are suggested by OSPI in the major content areas. These are available on the OSPI website.¹⁹ Because the lists are not considered exhaustive, educators are encouraged to add to the examples. Assessments to be used as classroom-based evidence (CBEs) have been developed by OSPI for some content areas.

Communicating Student Learning

Communicating student achievement often occurs in the form of grades and report cards that are issued periodically. Frequent and effective monitoring requires communicating student’s progress more often than the formal grading periods, e.g., quarter, semester, or end of course or year. To implement **coherent grading and reporting practices** requires **developing consensus** among educators and involving stakeholders in the discussion. **District and school policies** need to be developed to **reflect the underlying principles** of all students learning to high standards, fair and equitable treatment of all students while they are learning, appropriate grading practices, and accurate communication of student achievement. O’Connor has suggested ideas and guidelines for policies on grading and reporting in the book *How to Grade for Learning* (2002).

Although research does not support one best method of grading to use in all situations, some practices and policies are appropriate (Guskey, 1996). These guidelines can help to “ensure that grading and reporting practices are fair, equitable, and useful to students, parents, and teachers” (p. 20):

1. “Begin with a clear statement of purpose... A statement of purpose should address why grading or reporting is done, for whom the information is intended, and what the desired results are
2. Provide accurate and understandable descriptions of student learning
3. Use grading and reporting methods to enhance, not hinder, teaching and learning” (p. 20-21).

¹⁹ <http://www.k12.wa.us/CurriculumInstruct/default.aspx>

Stiggins (2005) gives the “bottom line” for developing sound grading practices. *“Grades must convey as accurate a picture of a student’s real achievement as possible. Any practice that has the effect of misrepresenting actual achievement of agreed standards is unacceptable.”* He summarizes guidelines to help prevent grading problems:

- “Grade on achievement of prespecified targets only, not intelligence, effort, attitude, or personality
- Always rely on the most current information available about student achievement
- Devise grades that reflect achievement status with respect to preset targets rather than improvement
- Decide borderline cases with additional information on achievement
- Keep grading procedures separate from punishment
- Change all policies that lead to miscommunication about achievement
- Advise students of grading practices in advance
- Add further detail to grade report when needed
- Expect individual accountability for learning even in cooperative environments
- Give credit for evidence of extra learning—not for doing extra work if it fails to result in extra learning” (p. 304).

Report cards traditionally are the primary means of communicating the results of student performance. Some researchers suggest augmenting the traditional report card to include more precise information regarding achievement. Letter grades are abstract; too often a wide-range of topics is condensed into a single grade, and, thus, obscures specific achievement information. Examples of ways to expand communication include portfolios, narratives that may or may not accompany letter grades or percentages; and rubrics. Some of these approaches lend themselves to student involvement in grading.

Building on the premise that the main purpose of grades is to **communicate achievement**, O’Connor (2002) distinguishes between the concepts and practices of marking, grading, and reporting. He stresses the importance of using precise definitions of terms. “Marking,” or scoring, according to O’Connor, is evaluation of specific pieces of student work or performances and may use a variety of symbols, e.g., letter grades, plus/minus, and so on. “Grading” is a summary of student work that is reported at prescribed intervals and must communicate the more recent and most consistent quality of student work. “Reporting” is the communication of factors that may include those other than the student’s “achievement,” e.g., attitude, behavior, and extenuating conditions.

In relation to grading, O’Connor and other assessment experts explain that formative and summative assessments should be treated differently. Formative assessment is primarily to provide information so teachers can adjust their teaching and students can improve their performance. **Formative assessments provide feedback**, in other

words, specific advice on how each student can improve. Formative assessment, therefore, **needs to be “risk-free,”** meaning it should not be included in final grades. In fact, not all “practice” needs to be scored or graded.

Monitoring Teaching and School Processes

Monitoring school and classroom processes requires collecting information on actual practices and **examining progress toward the school goals.** Bernhardt poses guiding questions that help educators examine school processes and provides a basis for collecting and analyzing data and making needed changes for improving teaching and learning. She suggests that educators ask

1. What do teachers want students to know and be able to do?
2. How are teachers enabling students to learn?

DuFour, DuFour, Eaker, and Karhanek (2004) suggest schools concentrate on three critical questions:

1. “What is it we want all students to learn—by grade level, by course, and by unit of instruction?
2. How will we know when each student has acquired the intended knowledge and skills?
3. How will we respond when students experience initial difficulty so that we can improve upon current levels of learning?” (p. 2-3).

Conditions that schools and teachers can influence include instructional and learning strategies, instructional time and location, student-teacher ratio, organization of instructional components, assessments, philosophies and strategies of classroom management, and personal relationships among students and between students and teachers (Bernhardt, p. 96). Bernhardt suggests schools use rubrics to give themselves an idea of where they started, where they are now, and where they want to be. These rubrics serve as **school assessments** and help focus a school staff on both the quality of instruction and the degree to which instructional processes are implemented.

Monitoring change processes and organizational development requires trusting relationships, a safe and secure environment, explicit valuing of individuals, both staff and students, with their different strengths and shortcomings, and most importantly, an unwavering attention to the learning needs of students. To be most effective in monitoring learning and teaching, the relationship needs to be

- “Collegial rather than a hierarchical relationship between teachers and supervisors
- Focused on teacher development rather than teacher conformity
- Facilitative of teachers collaborating with each other in instructional improvement efforts
- Supportive of teacher involvement in ongoing reflective inquiry” (Glickman, Gordon, & Ross-Gordon, 1998, in Downey, Steffy, English, Frase, & Poston, 2004, p. 9).

Monitoring and reflection tools provide school staff with procedures and suggestions that promote observation and reflection on classroom practices. Two examples are included here. The BERC STAR²⁰ provides a list of indicators or “look fors” that are organized by components focused on student behaviors. The Downey Walk-Through promotes brief informal classroom visits to support professional growth.

The STAR Search (2005), developed from research conducted in many Washington classrooms, is an observation protocol that is useful in teachers’ personal reflection. The components of the protocol are Skills/knowledge, Thinking, Application, and Relationships. Indicators have been identified for each of the fundamental questions:

- Did students actively read, write, and/or communicate?
- Did students demonstrate depth of conceptual understanding?
- Did students demonstrate thinking through reflection or metacognition?
- Did students extend their learning into relevant contexts?
- Did interpersonal interactions reflect a supportive learning environment?

The classroom “walk-through” has become rather popular in the past few years. A variety of protocols has been developed that are useful for different purposes, such as “Data in a Day.”²¹ The Downey Walk-Through is one process that was developed over years of use and refinement. This process is designed to support professional growth interdependently. As such, it encourages colleagues to think about practice, to encourage self-analysis and reflection, and to improve their practice. The approach is reciprocal, informal, and focuses on factors that influence higher student achievement. It is not a formal evaluation process. The approach involves five key ideas:

1. *Short, focused, yet informal observation*—two to three minutes is sufficient to observe anywhere from five to ten instructional decisions being made in a classroom. Regular, repeated observations in all classrooms in a school provide a more accurate picture of what is happening in a school.
2. *Possible area for reflection*—the “ultimate purpose of our walk-through with reflective dialogue is to enable every educator to become a reflective thinker.” Therefore, the observation serves to “trigger a thought that might be useful for the teacher to consider, one that might help the teacher in his or her decision making about effective practice” (p. 3).
3. *Curriculum as well as instructional focus*—observers “focus on curriculum and pedagogy” and “notice their impact on student behavior.”
4. *Follow-up occurs only on occasion and not after every visit*—a principal or supervisor “may want to visit a classroom as many as eight to ten times before ...engag(ing) the teacher in reflective dialogue” (p. 3).
5. *Informal and collaborative*—“There is no checklist of things to look for or judgments to be made. Checklists signal a formal observation and one that often looks like an inspection to the teacher.” This is an informal approach ... “about colleagues working together to help each other think about practice.

20 <http://www.bercgroup.com/>

21 <http://www.nwrel.org/scpd/scc/studentvoices/diad.shtml>

It is not about judging a teacher's effective use of a given teaching practice" (Downey, et al., 2004, p. 4).

During a Downey walk-through, the developers suggest these areas be observed:

- "Student Orientation to the Work—Do students appear to be attending when you first walk into the room?
- Curricular Decision Points—What objective(s) has the teacher chosen to teach at this time and how aligned are they to the prescribed (district or state) written curriculum?
- Instructional Decision Points—What instructional practice is the teacher choosing to use at this time to help students achieve the learning of the curriculum objectives?
- "Walk-the-Walls" Curricular and Instructional Decisions—What evidence is there of past objectives taught and /or instructional decisions used to teach the objectives that are present in the classroom—walk-the-walls, portfolios, projects in the room?
- Safety and Health Issues—Are there any noticeable safety or health issues that need to be addressed?" (Downey, et al., 2004, p. 21).

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7. Focused professional development

A strong emphasis is placed on training staff in areas of most need. Feedback from learning and teaching focuses extensive and ongoing professional development. The support is also aligned with the school or district vision and objectives.

Definition and explanation

Professional development covers a **breadth of learning opportunities for educators**, generally on-the-job, following pre-employment, or “preservice,” preparation and training. Inservice and staff development are frequently used synonyms. A growing consensus, in relation to educational reform, acknowledges continuous, on-site, job-embedded professional development as the best hope for changing instruction to improve student learning. No Child Left Behind, the 2001 re-authorization of the federal Elementary and Secondary Education Act, requires funds to be devoted to professional development in the area in which schools do not make adequate yearly progress.²² Frameworks that describe attributes and behaviors of educators, particularly in view of student learning, offer insights for improving practice (e.g., Danielson, 2007; OSPI, 2003; National Board for Professional Teaching Standards).²³ These frameworks help educators reflect on their teaching strengths and may identify areas for professional development. The frameworks also provide rubrics with descriptors on a continuum from beginning to expert or depicting the level of performance (e.g., at or below standard).

Effective professional development, when viewed as competency-based rather than deficit-based, is a **shared, public process**; it promotes **sustained interaction**; emphasizes **substantive, school-related issues**; relies on **internal expertise**; **expects teachers to be active participants**; emphasizes **the why as well as the how of teaching**; **articulates a theoretical research base**; and **anticipates that lasting change will be a slow process** (Collinson, 1996, cited in Hawley & Valli, 1999, p. 134).

22 <http://www.ed.gov/policy/elsec/leg/esea02/pg2.html#sec1116>

23 http://www.nbpts.org/the_standards/the_five_core_propositio?print=on

Several converging developments are responsible for the consensus on the importance of professional development. Research on school improvement has linked **change with professional development**. Research studies confirm the **ineffectiveness of conventional staff development** strategies for making substantive improvement in instruction and supports adoption of different ways to facilitate professional learning (Hawley & Valli, 1999, p. 128). In other words, “go and get” training by outside experts with educators as “passive recipients” is less effective than “job-embedded” professional development that occurs through multiple forms that are facilitated over-time (Sparks & Hirsh, 1997, p. 14).

High standards for student performance **require capacity for complex and collaborative problem solving**. **Facilitating learning requires much more of educators** than teaching by telling; consequently, teachers are required to develop deeper knowledge and new skills.

The “new science of learning” applies to the design and implementation of learning opportunities for adults as well as for children. Murphy and Alexander (2006) identify the key dimensions of academic learning that include “**development** (i.e., orderly and systematic changes that occur as a result of time and experience) and the **knowledge base** (i.e., one’s stores of understanding and conceptions about everything); **motivation/affect** (i.e., a state that energizes and directs behavior); and **strategic processing** and **executive functioning** (i.e., the ability to reflect upon and regulate one’s thoughts and behaviors) (p. 4). The authors expand these concepts and provide implications for teaching and learning for each of the dimensions.

The effectiveness of professional development must be **evaluated in relation to impact on student learning and improvement of teaching performance**, not just documented levels of participant satisfaction (Guskey, 2000). Standards for staff development, developed by the National Staff Development Council, explicitly call for a focus on **improvement of learning for all students** and address three key areas -- **context, process, and content**. **Context** standards include organizing adults into learning communities and requiring leadership and resources. **Process** standards include use of student data, multiple sources of information and research for decision making, and include applying knowledge about human learning and change. **Content** standards address equity for all students, quality teaching, and family involvement (NSDC, 2001).

Professional development that “works,” according to experts in the field, reflects some common themes, that include

- importance of **explicitly connecting teacher and student learning**
- supporting **professional collaboration** and collegial accountability with time and space for conversation, joint action, and critique
- coupling **teaching and assessment** practices
- encouraging the development of a **common language** through oral and written communication
- developing and using structured tools and protocols to guide discussion...

- using the **real-life events of teaching** as the source of professional development (Lieberman & Miller, 2001, p. ix).

Based on many research studies, Hawley and Valli (1999, 2000) synthesize nine principles for designing effective “learner-centered” professional development:

1. The content “focuses on **what students are to learn** and how to address the different problems students may have in learning that material.”
2. The content is “driven by analyses of the differences between (a) goals and standards for student learning and (b) student performance.”
3. Professional development involves “**teachers in the identification of what they need to learn**, and when possible, in the development of the learning opportunity and/or the process to be used.”
4. Professional development should be “primarily **school based and integral** to school operations” (i.e., “job-embedded”).
5. Professional development “provides learning opportunities that relate to individual needs and are, for the most part, organized around **collaborative problem solving**.”
6. Professional development must be “**continuous and ongoing, involving follow-up and support** for further learning, including support from sources external to the school that can provide necessary resources and outside perspectives.”
7. Professional development “incorporate(s) **evaluation of multiple sources** of information on outcomes for students and processes that are involved in implementing the lessons learned through professional development.”
8. “Professional development provides opportunities to engage in **developing a theoretical understanding** of the knowledge and skills to be learned.”
9. “Professional development should be integrated with a **comprehensive change process** that addresses impediments to and facilitators of student learning” (2000, p. 1-6).

Professional growth and development in Washington state is characterized by the Office of Superintendent of Public Instruction as **building teacher capacity** tied to the **impact on student learning** over a career-long continuum. The document *Washington State Professional Development IN ACTION: Linking Professional Development to Personalizing Student Learning* (2006)²⁴ applies six elements of impact to the levels of professional training and certification. The elements are written in terms of student knowledge and skills. Needs assessment rubrics include descriptors for “below, at, or above” standard from the perspective of student behavior.

Professional Development IN ACTION states, “Elements for positive impact provide a **common language and vision** of the scope and complexity of student learning by which all teachers can define and develop their practice. The elements and professional development process provide for **seamless growth** through the various **levels**

24 <http://www.k12.wa.us/ProfDev/pubdocs/ProfGrowthPlanningGuidelinesInAction.pdf>

of certification and career-long professional growth to positively impact student learning” (p. 1). Specifically, the elements include the following:

- I. “Student learning is structured for understanding
- II. Student learning experiences are designed to engage and support all students in learning
- III. Student assessment is used to direct learning
- IV. Students participate in maintaining effective environments for learning
- V. Students prepare to live and work in a multicultural world
- VI. Teachers develop the art and science of a professional educator and are active in the profession to positively impact student learning” (p. 1).

Research suggests the importance of teachers having opportunities for professional learning in their content areas and job assignments. The approaches and strategies included in the following implementation section are quite generic in that they apply across subject areas and grade levels. Space does not permit discussion of specific content area professional development opportunities or best practices.

Implementation suggestions

Teachers, schools, and districts together identify professional development needs and opportunities to build teacher capacity to improve student learning. The needs assessment worksheets and assessment rubrics included in *Professional Development IN ACTION* provide tools to help identify areas of strength and areas for growth in relation to impact on student learning. These tools are available on the OSPI webpage.

Various effective models of professional development embody the themes discussed in the definition; some examples are described below. In addition, professional learning communities are discussed as an approach to teacher learning that is associated with increased student learning.

Approaches for Professional Development

Four approaches for professional development are described briefly with suggestions for successful implementation: intensive mentoring and peer support; teacher inquiry, study groups and action research; collaborative lesson study and looking at student work; and walk-throughs. Other more traditional models such as university coursework are not included.

1. Mentoring and peer support

Peer coaching, mentoring, and school-based facilitators are variations of this approach. Peer coaching and mentoring may be provided formally or informally. **Formal programs** prepare experienced master teachers as coaches or mentors and provide consistent opportunity and procedures for them to assist others. The school-

based-facilitators model is another variation of mentoring and peer support. The facilitators may demonstrate lessons, coordinate and facilitate study groups, conduct professional development activities, and generally support the instructional change effort. **Informally** teachers may observe one another's classes and provide feedback in a non-threatening manner or share stories of what worked for them and what didn't. A few research studies have been conducted on coaching models (Brown, Stroh, Fouts, & Baker, 2005; Schen, Rao, & Dobles, 2005). Also, the Northwest Regional Educational Laboratory has developed a field guide for change facilitators (Miller, Campbell, Leffler, & Hansen, 2005).

2. Teacher inquiry

Teacher **study groups and action research** are approaches that engage a whole faculty or teacher teams in **collaborative investigations** related directly to school and classroom practices. Teacher inquiry, or investigations, is a relatively broad term that encompasses various approaches. **Study groups** may serve a variety of purposes, from reviewing research as part of school improvement activities for developing action plans to studying professional books to learn more about curriculum, an instructional method, or student learning issues. In these study groups faculty work together to increase their knowledge and develop skills that then may be implemented with mutual peer support. Several authors point to **action research** as a successful tool for professional development and school improvement and provide detailed suggestions for effective implementation (i.e., Calhoun, 1994; Glickman, 1993; Sagor, 1992). In essence, action research is a cyclical process in which teachers determine focus questions based on their school or classroom situation, collect and analyze data from multiple sources, study and select interventions, implement their strategies, reflect, evaluate, share their "lessons learned," and begin a new cycle. Action research also is outlined on page 29.

3. Lesson study and looking at student work

Lesson study, which occurs at the local level, is connected to the curriculum of the school, focuses on student learning, involves groups of teachers working collaboratively, and is based on long-term continuous improvement. Steps in lesson study include defining the problem, planning and teaching the lesson, evaluating and reflecting on the lesson, revising it and teaching the revised lesson (to different students), evaluating and reflecting again, and sharing the results (Stigler & Hiebert, p. 152).

The collaborative **study of student work** may follow various procedures, often called protocols. The protocols provide structure that helps create a "safe" environment for professional thinking and conversations. Examples of approaches and protocols are included on the Looking at Student Work website.²⁵ Although the protocols vary in procedures and complexity, generally they call for teachers to examine and discuss the work of students as a means to better understand student learning and to plan instruction accordingly (McDonald, 2001, in Lieberman & Miller p. 212).

²⁵ <http://www.lasw.org/protocol.html/>

One **protocol for examining student work** is *Collaborative Analysis of Student Learning* (CASL), developed by Langer, Colton, & Goff (2003), which is also mentioned on page 58. This system includes four components:

1. A framework for reflective inquiry
2. A culture for collaborative inquiry
3. The CASL inquiry phases (See list below)
4. Facilitation, leadership, and support.

The process establishes group norms and communication practices that create a safe and trusting environment which encourages teachers to examine, clarify, and collaborate to improve their teaching and student learning. The CASL Inquiry Phases include the following:

- “Define a target learning area as the focus of inquiry
- Analyze classroom assessments to identify focus students
- Meet in study groups to analyze student work, experiment with new strategies, and [document their work]
- Find more information to understand students, content, and strategies
- Assess and analyze whole-class performance on the target learning area
- Reflect upon student and teacher learning
- Celebrate successes and share portfolios” (p. 13).

4. Walk-throughs

The walk-through, coupled with reflection and brief conversations, is an approach used to observe classrooms on a regular, informal basis. “Brief, one-on-one, focused feedback (one-legged conversation) is the most powerful staff development approach available to impact and change behavior,” according to Hall and Hord (2000, in Downey, Steffy, English, Frase, & Poston, 2004, p. 8). In essence, walk-throughs provide a systematic approach for brief, regular “glances” into classrooms to enable administrators and supervisors, and sometimes other teachers, the opportunity to know what is going on in relation to curriculum and instruction. As such they provide information and opportunity for reflective dialogue between the observer and observed. This dialogue then leads to modifications in classroom instruction—initiated by the supervisor and most importantly by the teachers themselves. Districts and schools may implement guidelines and structures to promote walk-throughs (e.g., Community School District 2 in New York and San Diego School District). The Downey three-minute protocol is also described on page 93-94.

Professional Learning Communities

Professional learning communities are seen by many educational experts as an important means for reforming schools through improving instructional practice to increase learning. When teachers and administrators work together in a **collegial environment, learn together, support one another, and take joint responsibility**

for student learning, the challenges of high standards become more manageable and motivating. Educational experts stress that effective professional learning communities are **more than collegial groups**. Because collegial groups can serve to reinforce the status quo, even including negative beliefs and practices that may be “unfavorable to children,” Little (1990) emphasizes that educator beliefs, values, and intentions cannot be taken for granted. To be effective as school improvement strategies, professional learning communities must be committed to “improvement-oriented change” focused on student learning (p. 524),

Research supports the “**potential power** of ‘professional community’ in educators’ working lives” (Knapp, Copland, Ford, Markholt, McLaughlin, Milliken, & Talbert, 2003, p. 25). For example, research by Newmann (1996) and others found that student learning increased in response to the increased capacity of the whole organization as educators focused on teaching and learning and shared their work.

Hord (1997) summarizes the **benefits of professional learning communities** in a synthesis of research:

- “Reduction of isolation of teachers
- Increased commitment to the mission and goals of the school and increased vigor in working to strengthen the mission
- Shared responsibility for the total development of students and collective responsibility for students’ success
- Powerful learning that defines good teaching and classroom practice, that creates new knowledge and beliefs about teaching and learners
- Increased meaning and understanding of the content that teachers teach and the roles that they play in helping all students achieve expectations
- Higher likelihood that teachers will be well informed, professionally renewed, and inspired to inspire students
- More satisfaction and higher morale, and lower rates of absenteeism
- Significant advances into making teaching adaptations for students, and changes for learners made more quickly than in traditional schools” (p. 29).

There are various entry points for creating professional learning communities. Leaders can provide time and create joint work that engages a group of teachers.

At the **school level**, leaders have many ways to “build work cultures” around learning:

- “Create structures for regular staff interaction about learning and teaching
- Set up cycles of school-wide inquiry into learning and teaching performance, and participate in professional inquiry as a colleague
- Identify and address staff assumptions about norms, values, and beliefs related to learning
- Recruit teachers who work from a values base consistent with the culture that leaders seek to develop

- Create opportunities for staff to have voice in decisions about issues related to teaching and learning
- Celebrate accomplishments in student and teacher learning” (Knapp, et al., 2003, p. 26).

At the **district level**, “administrators and staff can act in similar ways to build professional community among staff within the central office, across schools, and in the broader community of educational stakeholders.” For example, leaders can:

- “Support assignments and scheduling that enable district staff to work together or that make it possible for individuals from different schools to interact
- Work with the union to establish provisions for collaborative work among teachers
- Redefine the work of the central office staff in terms of its relationship to learning improvement
- Guide a process of inquiry into district-wide organization and performance
- Take part in professional learning opportunities as a colleague” (Knapp, et al., p. 26).

Program Specific Professional Development

OSPI staff, with other educators, has produced several resources that can augment professional development opportunities in specific program areas. These resources were mentioned on page 70-71. Briefly, they include the **K12 Reading Model**, the **Response to Intervention** manual, and resources for **Migrant and Bilingual Education**. Educators can access professional development to help implement the models and obtain support in developing assessment and intervention strategies to improve student learning.

The migrant and bilingual program staff at OSPI²⁶ suggests the following examples of professional development approaches and techniques:

- **Guided Language Acquisition Design (GLAD)**. Project GLAD training provides research-based theory, practical and effective strategies that develop the teachers’ ability to provide for the development of academic language, literacy, academic achievement and cross-cultural skills of English language learners. Some schools find the approach particularly useful for inclusion classrooms.
- **Sheltered Instruction (SI)**. Sheltered instruction is a research-based approach used to prepare teachers to use specific strategies designed to teach content subject matter in the areas of reading, language arts, mathematics, and social studies. Since instruction occurs in English, teachers learn how to provide content in a comprehensible manner.

²⁶ <http://www.k12.wa.us/MigrantBilingual/default.aspx>

- **Sheltered Instruction Observation Protocol (SIOP).** SIOP is a research-based observation instrument that is a valid and reliable measure of sheltered instruction. The model is built on the premise that teachers possessing these skills will be prepared to provide English language learners with a better learning environment. Critical features of high quality instruction for English language learners are embedded within the SIOP Model.

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http://www.ncrel.org/sdrs/areas/rpl_esys/pdlitrev.htm	Results-oriented professional development by Thomas Guskey
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8. Supportive learning environment

The school has a safe, civil, healthy and intellectually stimulating learning environment. Students feel respected and connected with the staff and are engaged in learning. Instruction is personalized and small learning environments increase student contact with teachers.

Definition and explanation

A supportive learning environment can be defined as school climate and culture characterized by **reasonable expectations for behavior, consistent and fair** application of rules and regulation, and **caring responsive relationships** among adults and students. Classrooms are **warm and inviting** and **learning activities are purposeful, engaging,** and significant. Students are encouraged to **“take risks” in their learning** and are supported as they learn increasingly rigorous content and apply their knowledge in “real world” contexts. **Personalized learning** environments are created to increase positive relationships among students and between students and their teachers. **Students feel that they belong** in the school community. In a supportive learning environment children are **valued and honored;** their heritage and background are viewed as “assets,” not deficiencies. Mutual respect and trust are at the heart of a supportive learning environment.

Research in several arenas is relevant to creating and maintaining supportive learning environments:

- Effective schools research provides characteristics of **safe and orderly school** environments that are “orderly without being rigid, quiet without being oppressive, and generally conducive to the instructional business at hand” (Edmonds, 1979, p. 22).
- Research on **resiliency factors** emphasizes the importance of adults in creating supportive environments that foster student resiliency and identifies characteristics that foster increased academic success. **Positive relationships** among adults and students are critical.
- Research on small classes and small schools describes **personalized learning** environments that increase students’ **sense of belonging and opportunities** to participate actively in the school community.

- Research and professional literature suggest **classroom and instructional models that engage students emotionally, intellectually, and socially**.
- **Research supports the benefits of culturally responsive pedagogy** in creating positive classroom environments and impacting student learning. Researchers stress the importance of teachers' recognizing and entering the **frames of reference** of their students from every background.
- Research on **classroom management and discipline** identifies those practices that contribute to productive learning situations.

Implementation suggestions

Taking stock of the school culture, as experienced by students, teachers, and staff, is an important starting point in creating and sustaining supportive learning environments. Ideas synthesized from research provide useful criteria for analyzing a school's environment and for planning improvements. Conducting surveys that capture perceptions of students, staff, and families provides information on the current quality of a school's environment. (Examples of surveys are available on the OSPI website.)²⁷ Examining other information related to attendance, disciplinary referrals, dropouts, and participation in school activities, also reveals qualities of school climate. Research studies on topics such as those suggested above can be used by faculty study groups to develop a shared knowledge base. This collaborative work provides a foundation for the development of school improvement plans.

Safe and Personalized Environments

Practices for creating a safe and orderly environment, personalized supportive classrooms, and effective classroom management are described in the following sections.

Safe and orderly environment. "An efficient classroom organization and structure is crucial to maintaining an orderly and effective learning environment" (LePage, Darling-Hammond, Akar, with Gutierrez, Jenkins-Gunn, & Rosebrock, 2005, p. 340). Such orderliness in a classroom minimizes disruptions, delays, and distractions and increases learning time and maximum use of space.

The research on effective schools and classroom management suggests typical qualities of **safe and orderly schools** that include

- "A visible and supportive principal
- Broad-based agreement about standards for student behavior
- High behavioral expectations that are clearly communicated to students
- Input from students, especially older ones, into behavior policies
- Consistent application of rules from day to day and from student to student
- A warm school climate whose signature feature is a concern for students as individuals

²⁷ <http://www.k12.wa.us/SchoolImprovement/PerceptionSurveys.aspx>

- Delegation of disciplinary authority to teachers
- For seriously disruptive students, in-school suspensions accompanied by support” (Cotton, 2000, p. 6).

Increasing resiliency. Research reflects the importance of school personnel and school procedures in creating “**protective factors**” that help students learn to cope with adverse conditions. **Schools help foster resilient students** when they exhibit **caring and support** with **strong personal relationships**, positive and high expectations with the necessary support for students to achieve these expectations, and opportunities for meaningful participation in school (Benard, p. 100). One research report suggests qualities of instruction that support resilience: “richer explanations, encouragement of extended student responses, encouragement of students’ success, focus on the task’s learning processes” (Waxman, Gray, & Padron, 2002, p. 37). “**Turnaround**” teachers, those that succeed with at-risk students, **focus on the strengths** of all students; they especially empower overwhelmed youth to see themselves as survivors rather than as victims. They help **students process adversity** in their lives, to see adversity as impermanent, and to see setbacks not as pervasive but as surmountable or temporary. Turnaround teachers are **student-centered**, using students’ strengths, interests, goals and dreams as the starting point for learning and thereby tapping students’ intrinsic motivation for learning” (p. 40).

Personalized learning environments increase the likelihood that students, particularly those of color and poverty, will receive the **personal and academic support** they require to thrive in schools. Various approaches can be used to **enhance personalization in schools**. Organizing schools into **smaller communities**, such as “schools within a school,” assigning students to teachers for an **extended time** (e.g., looping), block scheduling, teacher teams, **advisories**, and creating small schools can increase the potential for students and teachers to get to build trust and positive relationships. Smaller school groups also increase the potential for more **varied and engaging instruction**, such as hands-on learning experiences, authentic projects, or community-linked activities. Research on class size in the early school years shows positive effects when classes are reduced to between 15 and 20 students. “The effects are greater for minority and poor children than for children in general” (Cotton, p. 16).

School-wide support and intervention programs can personalize students’ academic support, “catching” unsuccessful students before they fall too far behind. To develop such a program, schools are advised to answer three questions:

1. “What do we want all students to learn?”
2. How will we know when each student has learned it?
3. How will we respond when a student experiences difficulty in learning?” (DuFour, Eaker, & DuFour, 2005, p. 33).

A “Pyramid of Intervention” is an example of a system that ranges from broad-based supports to progressively more intensive levels of help for those who need it. Support may be provided through student support teams, conferencing and tutoring—first optional then mandatory, guided study programs, and mentoring programs (DuFour, DuFour, Eaker, & Karhanek, 2004).

Positive Learning Climate

A **supportive learning environment** is especially crucial when students are asked to develop advanced thinking skills that require them to try new ways of working with ideas and information (Cotton, 2000). Traditional schooling too often conveys the message “learn or we will punish you,” according to Barth (2005, p. 116). Barth advocates for removing the punitive aspects of schooling and **promoting life-long learning**, through principal modeling, adults in school making their learning visible, and enlisting parent participation. He identifies qualities of lifelong learning as

- “Loving learning for its own sake
- Engaging in learning on a voluntary basis
- Asking one’s own questions and taking responsibility
- Marshalling resources
- Sustaining engagement in learning
- Continuously reflecting
- Assessing one’s learning
- Knowing and celebrating successes” (p. 125-126).

Brophy (1998) characterizes classrooms that enhance **student motivation and engagement** as **learning communities**—“a place where students come **primarily to learn, and succeed** in doing so through **collaboration**” with the teacher and other students (p. 21). Learning communities promote curiosity, higher-level thinking, enhanced interpersonal skills, and confidence in both students and teachers. Ridnour (2006) calls for creating a learning community by “manag(ing) your classroom with heart,” in other words with “caring concern” (p. 3). Teachers help create a supportive learning environment by conveying warm regard for students as well as high expectations for learning.

Kleinfield captures the essence of building a supportive environment in her description of “**warm demanders**” (in Gay, 2000). Warm demanders are effective teachers, who created “classroom climates of emotional warmth; consistently and clearly demanded high-quality academic performance; spent time establishing positive interpersonal relationships between themselves and students, and among students; extended their relationships with and caring for students beyond the classroom; and communicated with students through nonverbal cues, such as smiles, gentle touch, teasing, and establishing a ‘kinesthetic feeling of closeness’” (p. 50-51).

Teachers can create classroom environments that effectively and positively support children’s learning. Effective strategies are summarized in Cotton’s research synthesis and exemplified in the instructional model “Quantum Teaching.” From the research synthesis, teacher behaviors that build effective classroom climate include:

- “Communicating high expectations for student performance; letting students know that they are all believed capable of meeting basic objectives, and no one is expected to fail

- Holding students accountable for completing assignments, turning in work, and participating in classroom discussions
- Providing the time, instruction, and encouragement necessary to help lower achievers perform at acceptable levels; this includes giving them learning material and activities as interesting and varied as those provided for other students
- Monitoring their own beliefs and behavior to make certain that high expectations are communicated to all students regardless of socioeconomic status, race, gender, or other personal characteristics
- Paying attention to students' interests, problems, and accomplishments
- Encouraging effort, focusing on the positive aspects of students' answers, products, and behavior
- Communicating interest and caring to students, both verbally and through such nonverbal means as giving undivided attention, maintaining eye contact, smiling, and nodding, to build rapport with students
- Sharing anecdotes and incidents from their personal experience and using humor as appropriate...
- Exhibiting democratic leadership and encouraging students to express and defend their views on significant issues..." (Cotton, 2000, p. 17).

An **instructional model** based on years of experience with thousands of at-risk students is called "**Quantum Teaching**" (DePorter, Reardon, & Singer-Nourie, 1999). The model **promotes teachers beginning instruction by first entering the students' world** "Theirs to Ours, Ours to Theirs" (similar to the Get, Give, Merge, Go strategy). **Basic tenets** of the model include

- using all aspects of the classroom environment to reinforce messages about learning
- providing learning experiences before "labeling" with the specific vocabulary
- acknowledging every learning effort
- removing all threats
- believing in students
- building rapport, knowing students well
- engaging students' emotions
- modeling, listening, reframing negative situations to find the positive
- promoting integrity, commitment, and responsibility.

The authors of *Quantum Teaching* provide **teacher-friendly suggestions** for implementing these strategies in ways that promote students' learning. The model suggests ways for teachers to create positive, productive learning environments. The model advocates use of practices based on theories of accelerated learning, multiple intelligences, neuro-linguistic programming, inquiry learning, and experiential learning, among others.

Culturally responsive pedagogy is crucial to creating positive classroom environments and effective classroom management. Culturally responsive pedagogy requires “that **teachers understand the views and learning preferences children may bring to school**, including...how students communicate in their communities.” Culturally responsive teachers “recognize that there are multiple ways of perceiving reality; hold affirming views of students from diverse backgrounds; believe they should and can bring about change to make schools more equitable; know about the lives of their students and incorporate sociocultural experience in the classroom; and know how children construct knowledge, and provide situations for promoting knowledge construction” (Villegas & Lucas, 2002, in LePage, et al., p. 335). Several suggestions for increasing equity in schools and classrooms are summarized in a research synthesis from the Northwest Regional Educational Laboratory.²⁸ More discussion on this topic appears on page 77-78.

Effort-based ability. Supportive classroom environments help students develop a **sense of efficacy**, so that students see themselves as successful learners. Many low achievers attribute their performance levels to luck, lack of ability, and other causes beyond their control. Students can be taught that their own efforts make a difference, that “**effective effort**” is the “main determinant of achievement—not innate ability” (Saphier, 2005, p. 90). As students come to believe in their own effort-based ability, “they will work harder and smarter because they come to believe it is worth their while to do so, and they have been taught explicitly *how* to do so.”

Effort-based ability requires three “crucial messages” from teachers:

1. “What we’re doing here is important.
2. You can do it!
3. I’m not going to give up on you—even if you give up on yourself” (Saphier, p. 90).

Teachers send important messages to students about their abilities through how they talk to students and respond to them. These messages are conveyed through various types of interactive teaching behaviors such as

- “Patterns of calling on students
- Responses to student answers
- Giving help
- Dealing with errors
- Giving tasks and assignments
- Offering feedback on student performance
- Displaying tenacity” (Saphier, p. 90-91).

According to Saphier, **explicit teaching of effective effort** includes six topics that can be taught to all students:

²⁸ <http://www.nwrel.org/scpd/re-engineering/rycu/index.shtml>

1. **Time.** Students must put in enough minutes and hours to get the job done and understand how much time is required for quality work.
2. **Focus.** Work time should be efficient and lacking in distraction.
3. **Resourcefulness.** Students are willing to reach out for help and know how to do so.
4. **Strategies.** Students know and use appropriate strategies to handle academic tasks.
5. **Use of Feedback.** Good students listen to and look carefully at the feedback they receive from teachers and use it to improve their performance.
6. **Commitment.** Effective effort is grounded in will. Students must want to accomplish something to put forth the effort and organize themselves to complete a tough learning task. They do not have to like it, but they must be committed to trying hard" (p. 98).

Teachers can use **classroom structures and procedures** to help students change their views regarding their efforts; examples include grading practices, re-teaching loops, "redos" and retakes, grouping, and rewards. The use of these procedures and structures should emphasize the students' learning needs and should not convey the idea that they reflect a negative view of overall ability.

Classroom Management

Research on **classroom management and discipline** suggests certain practices that contribute to positive classroom climate and to improved student achievement. "Classroom management has been broadly defined as actions taken to create and maintain a learning environment that supports instructional goals" (Brophy, 1988, in LePage, et al., p. 330). "The goals of classroom management include academic achievement, social and emotional development, collaboration, and character development. **Skillful classroom management makes good intellectual work possible**" (LePage, et al., p. 327).

Research studies find that effective classroom management "relies as much on **developing relationships and orchestrating a productive learning community** as it does on determining consequences for inappropriate behavior." Research supports a shift from "a focus on intervention—recognition and punishment for misbehavior—to a focus on **prevention through the development of classroom** communities in which norms are established and academic routines promote constructive work" (LePage, et al., p. 330).

Practices to manage classrooms effectively include

- "Creating meaningful curriculum and engaging pedagogy to support motivation"
- "Developing supportive learning communities," and encouraging parent involvement
- "Organizing and structuring the classroom," including decisions about timing and other aspects of instructional planning

- “Repairing and restoring behavior respectfully,” while supporting social and emotional development
- “Encouraging moral development” (LePage, et al., p. 332).

Six major kinds of **procedures or routines** identified in research support a “**well-functioning classroom.**” They include

1. “The physical setting of the room
2. Transitions in and out of the room
3. Procedures during group work
4. General procedures such as distributing materials or being on the playground
5. Procedures specific to particular classroom routines, such as attendance or putting homework on the board
6. Procedures or routines associated with student-initiated and teacher-led instruction” (LePage, et al., p. 341).

Wong and Wong (1998) stress that classroom management should not be equated with discipline. Discipline is only part of the larger issue of classroom management. These authors also advocate for the development of procedures and routines that create effective classrooms to facilitate learning. “A procedure is a DO, a step to be learned” (p. 169). Procedures can be taught through three steps:

1. **Explain.** State, explain, model, and demonstrate the procedure.
2. **Rehearse.** Rehearse and practice the procedure under your supervision.
3. **Reinforce.** Reteach, rehearse, practice, and reinforce the classroom procedure until it becomes a student habit or routine” (p. 174).

Classroom environments and organization facilitate different kinds of teaching. For example, successful activity-based classrooms are “highly structured and take a great deal of time to plan and organize. The quality of the learning depends on substantial prearrangement and preparation of materials, planning of activity structures, and skillful management of workflow.” Finally, “teachers must be able to design an **appropriate physical layout** for the classroom, **develop rules and procedures**, optimize learning time by developing **smooth transitions** between activities, set an **appropriate pace** for learning, and involve children in **creating a democratic space** where they have a sense of ownership and autonomy” (LePage, et al., p. 342). Researchers suggest, “There appears to be a **relationship between teachers’ abilities to manage a set of complex activities in the classroom and their ability to teach intellectually challenging materials**” (LePage, et al., p. 331).

Classroom management approaches range from high control, to medium or low control methods. Studies have found that high control approaches may over time lead to increased misbehavior as students “increasingly abandon their own self-responsibility for learning and behavior,” and resistance and student opposition may increase. “Low- and medium-control approaches may be more desirable because they are associated with high-quality teaching and greater intrinsic motivation for students, but most agree they require more teacher skill to implement” (Epstein & Sheldon, 2002, in LePage, et al., p. 346).

Selected examples of good practice, from the synthesis by Cotton, include

- “Classroom rules and procedures that are specific and clearly explained at the beginning of the school year and periodically reinforced thereafter, especially with children in grades K-3
- Beginning classes quickly and purposefully, with assignments, activities, materials and supplies ready for students when they arrive...
- Standards that are consistent or identical with the building code of conduct and that are applied consistently and equitably
- Involvement of older children in establishing classroom standards and sanctions
- Teaching and reinforcing positive, prosocial behaviors and skills, especially with students who have a history of behavior problems...
- Focusing on students’ inappropriate behavior when taking disciplinary action—not on their personalities or histories” (Cotton, 2000, p. 7).

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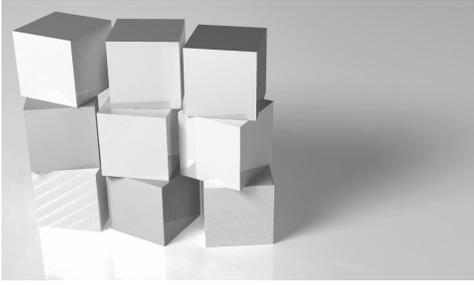
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9. High level of family and community involvement

There is a sense that all have a responsibility to educate students, not just the teachers and staff in schools. Families, as well as businesses, social service agencies, and community colleges/universities all play a vital role in this effort.

Definition and explanation

The education of students is the **shared responsibility** of teachers, school staff, families, and community, as well as students themselves. Businesses, social service agencies, early learning programs, community colleges and universities, and other training programs also have a part to play. Families and other adults can be involved in the education of young people through a variety of activities that demonstrate the importance of education, show support, and encourage students' learning. The research is clear that **family involvement is a key factor in a student's improved academic performance**. "This relationship holds across families of all economic, racial/ethnic and educational backgrounds and students at all ages." The benefits for students include higher GPAs, enrollment in more challenging classes, better attendance, improved behavior, and better social skills (Henderson & Mapp, 2002, p. 24).

Family involvement is more than a school program. It is a **way of thinking and doing** that recognizes the **central role that families play** in their children's education and the power of working together. "Children have advantages when their parents support and encourage school activities" (Constantino, 2003, p. 7-8). Also, "programs and interventions that engage families in supporting their children's learning at home are linked to higher student achievement" (Henderson & Mapp, 2002, p. 25). High-performing schools intentionally **link family involvement strategies to academic goals**. They make family involvement part of their school improvement plan and develop collaborative relationships among teachers, parents and the community.

Authentic partnerships. The Office of Superintendent of Public Instruction promotes the vision of **families, schools, and communities working together** in authentic

partnerships to support the achievement of all students. Strong school, family, and community partnerships are based on mutual commitment, responsibility, and respect. Such partnerships move family and community involvement beyond traditional activities such as fund raising and chaperoning school events to include shared decision making and home and community-based support of student learning.

The **responsibility for initiating partnerships lies primarily with the staffs of schools and districts**. Epstein asserts that “the **strongest and most consistent predictors of parent involvement at school and home are the specific school programs and teacher practices** that encourage and guide parent involvement” (Lewis & Henderson, 1998, p. 18). Epstein has developed a framework for school, family, and community partnerships which includes **six types of involvement** for comprehensive partnerships: parenting, communicating, volunteering, learning at home, decision making, and collaborating with the community. Family and community involvement does not necessarily require adults to spend time at the school building.

Cultural relevance. Building partnerships with families requires **finding common ground** with parents. Doing so “can reduce cultural conflicts that create competing psychological incentive structures for students” (Darling-Hammond, 1997, p. 174). Therefore, in diverse communities, **family involvement will need to include options** that accommodate family circumstances, provide choices, validate the family’s culture and values, and explicitly emphasize the importance of family support of the student’s learning. “Families of all cultural backgrounds, education and income levels encourage their children, talk with them about school, help them plan for higher education, and keep them focused on learning and homework. In other words, **all families can, and often do, have a positive influence** on their children’s learning” (Henderson & Mapp, 2002, p. 34)

Families should have the opportunity to participate in defining and developing a school’s involvement programs. The National PTA has published standards, with suggestions for implementation, to guide the development of parent/family involvement programs. The PTA standards, which mirror Epstein’s six types of involvement, include the following:

- **Communicating.** Communication between home and school is regular, two-way, and meaningful.
- **Parenting.** Parenting skills are promoted and supported.
- **Student Learning.** Parents play an integral role in assisting student learning.
- **Volunteering.** Parents are welcome in the school and their support and assistance are sought.
- **School Decision Making and Advocacy.** Parents are full partners in the decisions that affect children and families.
- **Collaborating with Community.** Community resources are used to strengthen schools, families, and student learning.

Implementation suggestions

Research shows that parents are most likely to become involved if they

- Understand they **SHOULD be involved**
- Know they are **CAPABLE of making a contribution**
- **Feel INVITED** by the school and their children (Commonwealth Institute for Parent Leadership).²⁹

Explicit policies and procedures are helpful to set expectations and to guide the development of family involvement and partnerships. Constantino suggests five steps for developing a guiding plan:

1. Awareness—Provide training for all to increase understanding and support of the value of family engagement. (For example, examine research to seek “correlations between engaged families and academically successful students.”)
2. Self-assessment—Discover the current degree of family friendliness within a school.
3. Program conceptualization and development—Develop policies, goals, and action plans.
4. Program implementation—Develop the “3 Ps” (policies, procedures, and practices), obtain resources, launch the program.
5. Evaluating and sustaining—Conduct surveys, collect other data and research (p. 56).

The planning of programs for increasing involvement needs to include **allocation of resources for both implementation of programs and for appropriate professional development** to ensure that teachers and principals have the “know how” to effectively engage families and communities.

Leadership in schools and districts has particular responsibility for engaging family, communities, and policy makers in improving student learning, according to Knapp, Copland, Ford, Markholt, McLaughlin, Milliken, and Talbert (2003). *Leading for Learning* suggests these essential tasks:

1. **“Making efforts to understand community, professional, and policy environments.**
2. **Building relationships with individuals and groups.** To foster general good will to support specific aspects of the learning improvement agenda, learning-focused leaders open lines of communication, develop alliances, and form coalitions with whoever has greatest relevance (positive or negative) for the learning improvement agenda.
3. **Anticipating resistances and devising ways to manage conflict.** Leaders engage in the political work of neutralizing resistance, heading off attacks, or strategically confronting external resistances when it makes sense to do so.

²⁹ <http://www.cipl.org>

4. **Garnering the full range of resources** (fiscal, intellectual, human, etc.) that support the learning agenda” (p. 31).

Family Involvement Practices for Schools and Districts

Based on research studies, some **validated practices** have been identified for engaging and working with families and community members. The following suggestions for schools and districts reflect these practices:

1. “Develop **written policies** that acknowledge the importance of parent/ community involvement and provid(e) ongoing support to parent involvement efforts
2. Make **special efforts to involve** the parents of economically disadvantaged, racial/ethnic minority, and language minority students, **who tend to be underrepresented** among parents involved in the schools
3. Work with **cultural minority parents and community members** to help children cope with any differences in norms noted between the home and the school
4. **Communicate repeatedly** to parents that their involvement can greatly enhance their children’s school performance regardless of their own level of education
5. Make parents of **young children aware that the earlier they become involved** in their child’s education, the more it benefits his or her learning
6. Communicate to parents that **students of all ages benefit** from parent involvement
7. **Encourage parents of young children to read** to them, every day if possible, and for at least 10 minutes at a time [*The National Children’s Reading Foundation recommends 20 minutes a day*]
8. Send home to **parents information** about upcoming classroom activities, examples of students’ work, and suggestions for at-home learning activities
9. **Offer parents different parent involvement options** to choose from, based on their schedule and interest, e.g., helping their children learn at home, helping out in the classroom, providing transportation for field trips
10. Encourage parents to provide a **suitable place** with necessary materials for children to **study at home and to monitor the homework** habits of children at least through the elementary grades
11. Be mindful that parents are **busy people with limited time** and refrain from asking them to devote unrealistic amounts of time to school-related activities
12. **Publish indicators of school quality** and provide them to parents and community members periodically to foster communication and stimulate public action” (Cotton, 2000, p. 19)
13. “Invite parents to sit on a range of school committees.
14. Involve parents in learning about and participating in all aspects of students’ school lives.
15. Keep parents involved in the curriculum, instruction, and assessment loop.

16. Call substantive meetings where parents are actively involved in understanding problems and discussing potential solutions.
17. Welcome parents at all times.
18. Go beyond report cards in keeping parents up to date on how their children are doing
19. Work with parents to head off problems" (Langer, 2004, p. 64).
20. "Establish parent/family resource centers
21. Conduct home visits" (George, McEwin, & Jenkins, 2000, p. 272-274).

Community Involvement in Schools

"Schools that work are part of the community. They involve their constituency in running the school and in maintaining high standards, and they also make the school a resource for the community" (Langer, 2004, p. 64). **Community partnerships** may include **formal and informal relationships** among schools and districts and the business community. Community involvement also appears to "benefit schools, families, and students, including improved achievement and behavior;" however, "there is less research on the effects of community involvement" compared with family involvement (Henderson & Mapp, 2002, p. 24). A range of programs can support student learning. Some examples of formal partnerships may be "adopting" a school or district through which a business may provide resources, e.g., people, equipment and/or money, to assist with school improvement. Informal relationships may occur when adults volunteer as role models, mentors, or for other activities. For example, "lunch buddies" is a program through which adults regularly meet a student at school for lunch and conversation.

Children benefit from adults in schools and communities serving as models and mentors. Clark (1990) described **community-based constructive learning activities** such as professionally guided learning activities, leisure activities including reading, writing, and conversation, museums and recreational activities. Those that assisted students with their learning met these criteria: they provided opportunities for time devoted to the activity, promoted active thinking while doing the task, provided supportive input by knowledgeable adults and peers, and included standards, goals, and expectations related to the activity (Henderson & Berla, 1994, p. 41).

Community involvement practices. Activities that engage families with student learning "integrate some of the different parts of students' lives, so that students feel rooted in the community and the school at the same time and nurtured in communities of caring" (Darling-Hammond, 1997, p. 146).

Several authors suggest practices for expanding engagement to include community members, such as

- "Sponsor and coordinate family and community education programs
- Coordinate health and social services
- Integrate community service programs into the curriculum
- Develop partnerships with youth-serving agencies" (George, et al., 2000, p. 275-284).

- “Act as a community resource
- Meet problems by setting up collaborative school-community problem-solving committees.
- Form partnerships with local business and civic groups to enhance students’ instructional experiences.
- Use parent and community expertise in the classroom to augment instruction.
- Collaborate with local colleges and universities in a range of educational projects” (Langer, p. 64).
- “Involve community members in schoolwide and classroom activities, giving presentations, serving as information resources, serving as reader/responders for students’ published writing,” and so on (Cotton, 2000, p. 20).

Evaluation of Involvement

Consistent monitoring and adjustment of family, school, and community partnership programs are necessary for success. Many authors suggest an annual review, not only for accountability purposes, but to measure progress.

Constantino (2003) suggests schools conduct a comprehensive evaluation of their family engagement programs and practices, which can be used as needs assessments as well as periodic reviews of progress. He suggests that representatives from groups of educators, families, and students review and answer the questions in the evaluation.

Epstein, et al. (2002) suggest schools implement Action Teams for Partnerships (ATP) with an annual review of membership, schedules, organization, and project implementation. Successful ATPs “help members communicate with each other, plan goal-oriented partnerships, conduct useful meetings, make decisions collegially and share leadership, and continue to improve partnerships” (p. 110).

Involvement Resources

Many resources are available to aid in creating, maintaining, or improving family, school and community partnerships.

- Research and information on creating family, school, and community partnerships are available through the Center for the Improvement of Student Learning (CISL), which is a clearinghouse at the Office of Superintendent of Public Instruction. First created as part of HB 1209, the center was re-established by the Washington Legislature in 2006.³⁰
- The Office of the Education Ombudsman (OEO) is a new agency within the Washington Governor’s Office created to assist elementary and secondary public school students and families. The office is independent and neutral and not a part of the state public education system. It assists the public in understanding the school system, how to find education-related resources, and how to resolve conflict with schools.

³⁰ <http://www.k12.wa.us/cisl>

- The *Leading for Learning* sourcebook offers suggestions for school and district leaders for building relationships with the broader community, the environments that potentially support or interfere with learning. School contexts include parent advocacy groups, neighborhood-based services, social, cultural and other community groups. District contexts include the broader community, including business, political, socioeconomic, racial, cultural, and human services organizations, and other associations or activities (Knapp, et al., 2004).
- *School, Family and Community Partnerships: Your Handbook for Action* describes potential benefits and offers sample action planning materials. It also provides evaluation forms to measure school, family and community partnerships and an end-of-the-year worksheet (Epstein, et al., 2002).
- The National PTA document provides suggestions for implementing the standards and gives examples of school programs. The Washington State PTA *Family Involvement Guide* also includes extensive suggestions for parents, families and schools; the sections are organized according to the National PTA standards.
- The publications from the National Center for Family and Community Connections with Schools highlight research studies and also include stories of effective parent and community involvement.³¹
- *Beyond the Bake Sale* provides concrete and practical suggestions for creating and maintaining family, school, and community partnerships. Specific tools for implementing partnerships are included in the book, such as rubrics that describe characteristics of a “partnership school” (p. 15) and checklists that help schools assess their efforts (Henderson, Mapp, Johnson, & Davies, 2005).
- In the appendix to his book *Engaging All Families*, Constantino (2003) suggests 100 ways to make a school family friendly. He sees family engagement as an approach schools can use in meeting basic needs of students: “to do well, to be safe, and to feel love” (p. 140).

References

(* indicates those cited above)

http://www.k12.wa.us/cisl/	Center for Improvement of Student Learning
www.waparentlearn.org	Office of the Education Ombudsman, Office of the Governor
http://www.centerforparentleadership.org	Center for Parent Leadership at the Pritchard Committee
http://www.cipl.org	Institute for Parent Leadership
http://www.cppsofseattle.org/	Community & Parents for Public Schools of Seattle

³¹ <http://www.sedl.org/connections/>

http://www.gse.harvard.edu/hfrp/projects/fine.html	The Family Involvement Network of Educators (FINE) Harvard Family Research Project
http://www.publiceducation.org	Public Education Network (PEN)
http://www.wssda.org/	Washington State School Directors Association
http://www.pta.org/	National Parent Teacher Organization
http://www.partnership4learning.org	Partnership for Learning
http://www.pta.org/parentinvolvement/standards/index.asp	National Standards for Parent/Family Involvement Programs
http://www.wastatepta.org/resources/Family_involvement_guide.PDF	Family Involvement Guide
http://www.ncrel.org/sdr/areaspa0cont.htm	Family & Community Pathways
http://www.csos.jhu.edu/p2000	Family, school, and community involvement.
http://www.edletter.org/past/index.html	Harvard Education Letter, past issues. Of note: September/October 1997.
http://www.ed.gov/pubs/Reform/	School based reform. Role of parents and community in school reform
http://www.ed.gov/pubs/SER/ParentComm/index.html	Studies in Education Reform: Parent and Community Involvement in Education
http://www.nwrel.org/scpd/reengineering/keyissues/schoolfamily.shtml	Students at the Center. School, Family, and Community Partnerships
http://www.prrac.org/pubs_aiu.php	Add It Up: Using Research to Improve Education for Low-Income and Minority Students

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- *Washington State PTA. *Family Involvement Guide*. <http://www.wastatepta.org/resources/parentresources.htm>

Summary and conclusions

The nine characteristics of high-performing schools provide a rigorous framework to assist educators in school improvement. This resource defines and explains the characteristics. It offers ideas and strategies for implementing each characteristic. In addition, it lists many references that educators may use to examine the topics more thoroughly. Although it is not an exhaustive discussion of school improvement issues, it offers a beginning point and directs educators to additional resources.

The research is clear. To be effective, school improvement processes must go beyond superficial activity. Schools may address the topics of the characteristics without making the fundamental changes in beliefs, attitudes, and instructional practices that lead to second order change. A school will fall short if the characteristics result only in first order change, e.g., mechanically matching topics in the Grade Level Expectations with textbooks or changing bell schedules. Classroom learning and teaching practices must reflect the attributes depicted in the characteristics: focus, high expectations, leadership, deeply aligned curriculum, instruction, and assessment, monitoring learning and teaching, professional development, supportive environment, and high levels of family and community involvement. It is self evident that the successful learning of students depends on the quality of their school experiences. Schools make a difference; teachers and instructional practices make the most difference.

Although this resource presents the characteristics separately as relatively discrete components, the characteristics are interrelated. The research and professional literature provide evidence that student learning increases in schools that systematically attend to all of these characteristics. Schools and districts can use the resource to inform their school improvement efforts.

The school improvement perception surveys included in the appendices are tools to help schools and districts determine the progress they are making with their school improvement plans. Perception surveys, which capture thoughts and feelings at a point in time, are one form of data to be considered in school improvement efforts.

Since the passage of House Bill 1209 in 1993, Washington educators and stakeholders have been engaged in the hard work of changing schools and improving student learning. In recent years, school improvement planning has been linked with the nine characteristics of high-performing schools. We have learned a great deal about the work of educational reform. Improvements have been made. The challenge remains to marshal the political will and necessary resources to complete the job—to close the “knowing-doing gap” and to help all students reach the high standards that we have set for them.



Appendix A: Bibliography and analysis matrix

Twenty-five national and Washington state research studies comprise the research base for the nine characteristics of high-performing schools. OSPI researchers reviewed and analyzed the studies to confirm the rigor of the nine characteristics. The appendix lists the bibliography of these studies. A matrix that reflects the analysis follows.

National Research Reports

Comprehensive School Reform: Five Lessons from the Field. Education Commission of the States, 1999.

Dispelling the Myth: High Poverty Schools Exceeding Expectations, Education Trust, 1999.

Educational Reform and Students at Risk, Vol. I-III, Robert Rossi and Samuel Stringfield, U.S. Department of Education, 1995.

Hawthorne Elementary School: The University Perspective, Bruce Frazee (Trinity University, Texas), Journal of Education for Students Placed At Risk, 1(1), 25-31, 1996.

Hope for Urban Education: A Study of Nine High-Performing, High-Poverty, Urban Elementary Schools, Charles A. Dana Center, University of Texas (Austin), U.S. Department of Education, 1999.

Key High School Reform Strategies: An Overview of Research Findings, Mary Visher, David Emanuel, Peter Teitelbaum (MPR Associates), U.S. Department of Education, 1999.

Leave No Child Behind: An Examination of Chicago's Most Improved Schools and the Leadership Strategies Behind Them, Karen Carlson, Shobha Shagle-Shah, and Delia Ramiriz, Chicago Schools Academic Accountability Council, 1999.

Organizational Characteristics of Schools that Successfully Serve Low-Income Urban African American Students. B. Cole-Henderson. Journal of Educational Students Placed at Risk, 5(1 & 2), 77-91.

Profiles of Successful Schoolwide Programs, Volume 2: Implementing Schoolwide Programs, U.S. Department of Education, 1998 (http://www.ed.gov/pubs/idea_profiles/).

Promising Practices Study of High-Performing Schools. Jerry Junkins Promising Practices Institute. Just for the Kids, July 2000.

Promising Programs for Elementary and Middle Schools: Evidence of Effectiveness and Replicability, Olatokunbo Fashola and Robert Slavin (Johns Hopkins University), Journal of Education for Students Placed At Risk, 2(3), 251-307, 1997.

Schooling Practices That Matter Most, Kathleen Cotton, Northwest Regional Educational Laboratory, and Association for Supervision and Curriculum Development, 2000.

Schools that Make a Difference: Final Report. Twelve Canadian Secondary Schools in Low-Income Settings. N. Henchey, with M. Dunnigan, A. Gardner, C. Lessard, N. Muhtadi, H. Rahma, and C. Violato. Society for the Advancement of Excellence in Education, November 2001.

Stories of Mixed Success: Program Improvement Implementation in Chapter 1 Schools, Catherine George, James Grisson, and Anne Just (California Department of Education), Journal of Education for Students Placed At Risk, 1(1), 77-93, 1996.

Successful School Restructuring. A Report to the Public and Educators by the Center on Organization and Restructuring of Schools, F. M. Newmann and G. G. Wehlage. University of Wisconsin, 1995.

Toward an Understanding of Unusually Successful Programs for Economically Disadvantaged Students, Lorin Anderson and Leonard Pellicer, Journal of Education for Students Placed At Risk, 3(3), 237-263, 1998.

Turning Around Low-Performing Schools: A Guide for State and Local Leaders, U.S. Department of Education, 1998.

Washington State Research Reports

Bridging the Opportunity Gap. How Washington Elementary Schools are Meeting Achievement Standards, J. T. Fouts, M. L. Abbott, and Baker, D.B. Washington School Research Center, May 2002.

Making Standards Meaningful: High School Reform Efforts in Washington State, Sara Taggart and Mary Beth Celio, Center on Reinventing Public Education (University of Washington), October 2001. (A summary of this publication is published by the Partnership For Learning.)

Making Standards Stick: A Follow-Up Look at Washington State's School Improvement Efforts in 1999–2000, Robin Lake, Maria McCarthy, Sara Taggart, and Mary Beth Celio, Center on Reinventing Public Education (University of Washington), April 2000. (A summary of this publication is published by the Partnership For Learning.)

Making Standards Work: Active Voices, Focused Learning, Robin Lake, Paul Hill, Lauren O'Toole, and Mary Beth Celio, Center on Reinventing Public Education (University of Washington), February 1999. (A separate publication with the same name is published by the Partnership For Learning.)

Organizing for Success (Updated): Improving Mathematics Performance in Washington State, Office of Superintendent of Public Instruction, July 2000. (This updated edition includes results from the original *Organizing for Success* published in July 1999.)

Reality of Reform: Factors Limiting the Reform of Washington's Elementary Schools, Jeffrey Fouts and Carol Stuen, Seattle Pacific Univ., Mary Alice Anderson, Yelm School District, and Timothy Parnell, Lake Washington School District, May 2000.

School Restructuring and Student Achievement in Washington State: Research Findings on the Effects of House Bill 1209 and School Restructuring on Western Washington Schools, Jeffrey Fouts, Seattle Pacific University, January 1999.

Washington State Elementary Schools on the Slow Track Under Standards-Based Reform, Maria McCarthy and Mary Beth Celio, Center on Reinventing Public Education (University of Washington), October 2001. (A summary of this publication is published by the Partnership for Learning.)

Research Base

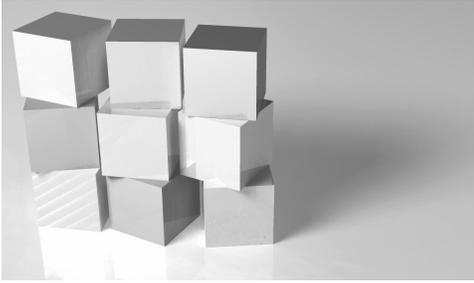
Summary

	Characteristics of High-Performing Schools								
	Clear & Shared Focus	High Standards & Expectations	Effective School Leadership	High Levels of Collabor. & Commun.	Curric., Instruct., & Assessment Aligned with Standards	Frequent Monitoring of Teaching & Learning	Focused Profess. Develop.	Supportive Learning Environ.	High Level of Family & Community Involvement
National Reports									
Comprehensive School Reform	X			*	X	*	X		X
Dispelling the Myth		X			X	X	X		X
Educational Reform and Students at Risk	X		*	X	*	X	X	X	*
Hawthorne Elementary School	X	X	X	X	*		X		X
Hope for Urban Education	X	*	X	X	X		X	X	X
Key High School Reform Strategies		X		X			X		X
Leave No Child Behind	X	X	X	X	X	X	X		X
Org. Characteristics of Schools that ... Serve ...	X	X	X	X	X		X	X	X
Profiles of Successful Schoolwide Programs	X	*	X	X	X	*	X	*	X
Promising Practices Study of High-Performing Schools	X	*	X	*	*	X	X		
Promising Programs for Elementary and Middle Schools	X				X	X	X		
Schooling Practices That Matter Most	X		X		*	X	*	X	X
Schools that Make a Difference	X	X	X	X	X	X	X	X	X
Stories of Mixed Success	X		X	X	X		X		X
Successful School Restructuring	X	*	X	X	X	*	X	X	*
Toward an Understanding of ... Successful ...	X	X	X	X	X	X	X	X	X
Turning Around Low-Performing Schools	X	X	X	X	X	X	X	X	X
Washington Reports									
Bridging the Opportunity Gap	X	X	X	X	*	X	X	X	X
Making Standards Meaningful	X	X						*	
Making Standards Stick	X	X	*	X	X	X	X		X
Making Standards Work	X			X	*		X		X
Organizing for Success	X	X	X	X	X	*	X		X
Reality of Reform			0	*				0	0
School Restructuring and Student Achievement in WA	X			X			X		X
Washington State Elementary Schools on Slow Track ...	0		0	0	0		0		
Total	22	16	18	21	21	15	23	12	21

X Explicitly identified as key finding or in discussion of findings

* Inferred or identified indirectly in descriptions

0 Identified as important by noting the absence or lack thereof



Appendix B: Surveys

The attached perception surveys are designed for school and district use. None of the data is collected by the state. The information may be used as a needs assessment or as a progress report to determine the degree of implementation of the characteristics of high-performing schools. The perception surveys are useful to determine respondents' thinking at a point in time. They provide one type of data for school improvement planning. The surveys are also on the OSPI webpage.

SCHOOL STAFF SURVEY OF SCHOOL CHARACTERISTICS

To improve school quality and help students learn, school personnel need to identify their strengths and areas needing improvement. Obtaining your views about your school is an important part of this process.

The survey on the following pages was developed to generate discussion that can help your school improve efforts. Each of the statements in the survey relate to one or more of the nine characteristics of high-performing schools. (For more information on these types of schools, see <http://www.k12.wa.us/research/pubdocs/pdf/9charactfor%20SIP.pdf>)

It will take you about 10 minutes to complete the survey. To ensure your responses remain confidential, your ratings will be combined with other staff and reported as a group. Completing the survey is voluntary, although we encourage you to respond honestly

to help your school get a complete understanding of staff views. To help keep survey responses confidential, consider using an independent party (ESDs, universities, consultants, etc.) to give the survey and analyze the results.

Survey Scale: The survey on the following pages uses a 5-point scale, from 1 meaning you “do not agree at all” to 5 meaning you “agree completely.” Indicate the number that best describes your level of agreement about each statement. If you have no knowledge to make an accurate selection, mark 0 in the first column (“no basis to judge”).

Before taking the survey, please complete the bottom half of this page. This information will be used for analysis purposes only, and results will not be reported for categories that have fewer than five (5) responses.

District: _____ School: _____ Date (month/year): _____

1. Level/Type of School (check all that apply):

- Elementary Middle/Junior High
 High School Other (specify: _____)

2. Grades Served by this School (e.g., K–6): _____

3. Your primary role (check one): Teacher Building administrator
 Other certificated staff Para-educator
 Other classified staff

4. Years working in your current role: 0–3 4–7 8–15 16 or more
(include work in other locations)

5. Years working in this school (check one): 0–3 4–7 8–15 16 or more

6. Grade(s) taught (circle all that apply): K 1 2 3 4 5 6 7 8 9 10 11 12 Not applicable

7. [Optional: For individual school use]: _____

Think about your school as you read each of the statements below. Then circle the number that best describes how much you agree with that statement.

	No basis to judge	Don't agree at all	Agree slightly	Agree moderately	Agree mostly	Agree completely
1. Vision						
a) The school has a clear sense of purpose.	0	1	2	3	4	5
b) I have a clear understanding of what the school is trying to achieve.	0	1	2	3	4	5
c) The staff shares a common understanding of what the school wants to achieve.	0	1	2	3	4	5
d) All staff are committed to achieving the school's goals.	0	1	2	3	4	5
e) The staff keeps the school's goals in mind when making important decisions.	0	1	2	3	4	5
f) The school's primary emphasis is improving student learning.	0	1	2	3	4	5
2. Standards/Expectations						
a) All students are expected to achieve high standards.	0	1	2	3	4	5
b) Teachers do whatever it takes to help all students meet high academic standards.	0	1	2	3	4	5
c) I believe all students can learn complex concepts.	0	1	2	3	4	5
d) All students are consistently challenged by a rigorous curriculum.	0	1	2	3	4	5
e) Teachers use effective strategies to help low-performing students meet high academic standards.	0	1	2	3	4	5
3. Leadership						
a) Many staff provide leadership in some way.	0	1	2	3	4	5
b) Leaders advocate for effective instruction for all students.	0	1	2	3	4	5
c) People in leadership roles act with integrity.	0	1	2	3	4	5
d) School administrators consider various viewpoints when making decisions.	0	1	2	3	4	5
e) Leaders hold staff accountable for improving student learning.	0	1	2	3	4	5
f) I feel like the school leadership cares about me.	0	1	2	3	4	5

	No basis to judge	Don't agree at all	Agree slightly	Agree moderately	Agree mostly	Agree completely
4. Collaboration/Communications						
a) The school uses a system to obtain a variety of perspectives when making decisions.	0	1	2	3	4	5
b) Teachers discuss teaching issues on a regular basis.	0	1	2	3	4	5
c) Staff members work together to solve problems related to school issues.	0	1	2	3	4	5
d) The staff works in teams across grade levels to help increase student learning.	0	1	2	3	4	5
e) Staff routinely work together to plan what will be taught.	0	1	2	3	4	5
f) Teachers have frequent communication with the families of their students.	0	1	2	3	4	5
g) Staff members trust one another.	0	1	2	3	4	5
5. Alignment to Standards						
a) The school's curriculum is aligned with state standards (EALRs).	0	1	2	3	4	5
b) Instructional staff have a good understanding of the state standards in the areas they teach.	0	1	2	3	4	5
c) Instructional materials that are aligned with the EALRs are available to staff.	0	1	2	3	4	5
d) Instruction builds on what students already know.	0	1	2	3	4	5
e) Schoolwork is meaningful to students.	0	1	2	3	4	5
f) Teachers use a variety of approaches and activities to help students learn.	0	1	2	3	4	5
g) Classroom activities are intellectually stimulating.	0	1	2	3	4	5
h) I know the research basis for the instructional strategies being used.	0	1	2	3	4	5
i) The staff uses WASL results to help plan instructional activities.	0	1	2	3	4	5
6. Monitoring of Teaching and Learning						
a) Students receive regular feedback about what they need to do to improve.	0	1	2	3	4	5
b) Students receive extra help when they need it.	0	1	2	3	4	5
c) Teachers modify their instructional practices based on classroom assessment information.	0	1	2	3	4	5
d) Teachers receive regular feedback on how they are doing.	0	1	2	3	4	5
e) Teaching and learning are the focus of staff observations and evaluations.	0	1	2	3	4	5
f) Teachers provide feedback to each other to help improve instructional practices.	0	1	2	3	4	5
g) High quality work is expected of all the adults who work at the school.	0	1	2	3	4	5

(Continued on next page)

	No basis to judge	Don't agree at all	Agree slightly	Agree moderately	Agree mostly	Agree completely
7. Professional Development						
a) Assessment results are used to determine professional learning activities.	0	1	2	3	4	5
b) Staff members get help in areas they need to improve.	0	1	2	3	4	5
c) Professional development activities are consistent with school goals.	0	1	2	3	4	5
d) I have enough opportunities to grow professionally.	0	1	2	3	4	5
e) Different staff members periodically lead professional development activities for other staff.	0	1	2	3	4	5
f) Instructional staff view themselves as learners as well as teachers.	0	1	2	3	4	5
8. Learning Environment						
a) Students feel safe on school property during school hours.	0	1	2	3	4	5
b) The school environment is conducive to learning.	0	1	2	3	4	5
c) Teachers show they care about all of their students.	0	1	2	3	4	5
d) The staff respects the cultural heritage of students.	0	1	2	3	4	5
e) Students respect those who are different from them.	0	1	2	3	4	5
f) Instruction is adjusted to meet individual student needs.	0	1	2	3	4	5
g) Student discipline problems are managed well.	0	1	2	3	4	5
h) The staff feels free to express their ideas and opinions with one another.	0	1	2	3	4	5
9. Family & Community Involvement						
a) The staff believes students learn more through effective family support.	0	1	2	3	4	5
b) The school works with many community organizations to support its students.	0	1	2	3	4	5
c) The school makes a special effort to contact the families of students who are struggling academically.	0	1	2	3	4	5
d) Teachers have frequent contact with their student's parents.	0	1	2	3	4	5
e) The school provides ample information to families about how to help students succeed in school.	0	1	2	3	4	5
f) Many parents are involved as volunteers at the school.	0	1	2	3	4	5

Comments or response to optional question(s): _____

Student Survey — High school grades

This survey relates to various qualities of your school. Your views are important to help improve your school. Please respond honestly to each statement below — your responses will remain confidential.

This survey should take you about 10 minutes to complete. It uses a 5-point scale, with 1 meaning you “don’t agree at all” with the statement, and 5 meaning you “agree completely.” (Use the X when you don’t know or the statement does not apply.) Mark one number for each statement.

School District _____ Month of Year _____

School Name _____ Grades Served by School _____

Think about your school as you read each statement below. Then **circle** the number that best describes how much you agree with that statement.

How much do you agree with this statement?	Don't Know/ Not Applicable	Don't agree at all	Agree slightly	Agree moderately	Agree mostly	Agree completely
1. My school has goals that students understand.	X	1	2	3	4	5
2. The main purpose of my school is to help students learn.	X	1	2	3	4	5
3. Teachers make it clear what I am supposed to learn.	X	1	2	3	4	5
4. I know why it is important for me to learn what is being taught.	X	1	2	3	4	5
5. My classes challenge me to think and solve problems.	X	1	2	3	4	5
6. Teachers expect all students to work hard.	X	1	2	3	4	5
7. Teachers expect all students to succeed, no matter who they are.	X	1	2	3	4	5
8. My classes are interesting.	X	1	2	3	4	5
9. Teachers give me challenging work.	X	1	2	3	4	5
10. My teachers make learning interesting by teaching in different ways.	X	1	2	3	4	5
11. Students feel free to express their ideas and opinions.	X	1	2	3	4	5
12. My teachers help me when I don't understand something.	X	1	2	3	4	5
13. Teachers give students extra help if it is needed.	X	1	2	3	4	5
14. My teachers encourage me.	X	1	2	3	4	5
15. Students are given many chances to show what we have learned.	X	1	2	3	4	5
16. Tests and quizzes are related to the material and ideas we are supposed to learn.	X	1	2	3	4	5
17. Grades are given in a fair manner.	X	1	2	3	4	5
18. Discipline problems are handled fairly.	X	1	2	3	4	5
19. Teachers are constantly trying to become better teachers.	X	1	2	3	4	5
20. The adults in my school work well together.	X	1	2	3	4	5

(Continued on next page)

How much do you agree with this statement?	Don't Know/ Not Applicable	Don't agree at all	Agree slightly	Agree moderately	Agree mostly	Agree completely
21. My teachers know me on a personal basis, not just as a student in their class.	X	1	2	3	4	5
22. The adults in my school show respect for me.	X	1	2	3	4	5
23. Students respect those who are different from them.	X	1	2	3	4	5
24. The teachers and other adults in my school show respect for each other.	X	1	2	3	4	5
25. I feel safe when I am at school.	X	1	2	3	4	5
26. Students have many chances to participate in school activities (e.g., sports, clubs).	X	1	2	3	4	5
27. The school environment makes it easy to learn.	X	1	2	3	4	5
28. The adults who work at my school care about all students, not just a few.	X	1	2	3	4	5
29. My teachers will contact my family if I am having problems learning.	X	1	2	3	4	5
30. Many parents and adults from the community come and help at the school.	X	1	2	3	4	5

Comments or response to optional question(s):

To complete this survey, please answer several questions about yourself (*check one for each question*).

A. What grade are you in? 9th 10th 11th 12th Ungraded Not sure

B. What is your gender? Male Female

C. What is your primary race/ethnicity? Amer. Indian/Native Amer. African American/Black
 Asian/Pacific Islander Hispanic/Latino
 White/Caucasian Multi-racial

D. What is your approximate grade point average (GPA)?
 Above 3.50 3.00-3.50 2.50-2.99
 2.00-2.49 1.50-1.99 1.00-1.49
 Below 1.00 Ungraded/Don't Know

E. [Optional] _____

Thank you for sharing your opinions!

Student Survey — Middle grades

This survey relates to various qualities of your school. Your views are important to help improve your school. Please respond honestly to each statement below — your responses will remain confidential.

This survey should take you about 10 minutes to complete. It uses a 5-point scale, with 1 meaning you “don’t agree at all” with the statement, and 5 meaning you “agree completely.” (Use the X when you don’t know or the statement does not apply.) Mark one number for each statement.

School District _____ Month of Year _____

School Name _____ Grades Served by School _____

Think about your school as you read each statement below. Then **circle** the number that best describes how much you agree with that statement.

How much do you agree with this statement?	Don't Know/ Not Applicable	Don't agree at all	Agree slightly	Agree moderately	Agree mostly	Agree completely
1. My school has goals that students understand.	X	1	2	3	4	5
2. The main purpose of my school is to help students learn.	X	1	2	3	4	5
3. Teachers make it clear what I am supposed to learn.	X	1	2	3	4	5
4. I know why it is important for me to learn what is being taught.	X	1	2	3	4	5
5. My classes challenge me to think and solve problems.	X	1	2	3	4	5
6. Teachers expect all students to work hard.	X	1	2	3	4	5
7. Teachers expect all students to succeed, no matter who they are.	X	1	2	3	4	5
8. My classes are interesting.	X	1	2	3	4	5
9. Teachers give me challenging work.	X	1	2	3	4	5
10. My teachers make learning interesting by teaching in different ways.	X	1	2	3	4	5
11. Students feel free to express their ideas and opinions.	X	1	2	3	4	5
12. My teachers help me when I don't understand something.	X	1	2	3	4	5
13. Teachers give students extra help if it is needed.	X	1	2	3	4	5
14. My teachers encourage me.	X	1	2	3	4	5
15. Students are given many chances to show what we have learned.	X	1	2	3	4	5
16. Tests and quizzes are related to the material and ideas we are supposed to learn.	X	1	2	3	4	5
17. Grades are given in a fair manner.	X	1	2	3	4	5
18. Discipline problems are handled fairly.	X	1	2	3	4	5
19. Teachers are constantly trying to become better teachers.	X	1	2	3	4	5
20. The adults in my school work well together.	X	1	2	3	4	5

(Continued on next page)

How much do you agree with this statement?	Don't Know/ Not Applicable	Don't agree at all	Agree slightly	Agree moderately	Agree mostly	Agree completely
21. My teachers know me on a personal basis, not just as a student in their class.	X	1	2	3	4	5
22. The adults in my school show respect for me.	X	1	2	3	4	5
23. Students respect those who are different from them.	X	1	2	3	4	5
24. The teachers and other adults in my school show respect for each other.	X	1	2	3	4	5
25. I feel safe when I am at school.	X	1	2	3	4	5
26. Students have many chances to participate in school activities (e.g., sports, clubs).	X	1	2	3	4	5
27. The school environment makes it easy to learn.	X	1	2	3	4	5
28. The adults who work at my school care about all students, not just a few.	X	1	2	3	4	5
29. My teachers will contact my family if I am having problems learning.	X	1	2	3	4	5
30. Many parents and adults from the community come and help at the school.	X	1	2	3	4	5

Comments or response to optional question(s):

To complete this survey, please answer several questions about yourself (*check one for each question*).

- A. What grade are you in? 6th 7th 8th 9th Ungraded Not sure
- B. What is your gender? Male Female
- C. What is your primary race/ethnicity? Amer. Indian/Native Amer. African American/Black
 Asian/Pacific Islander Hispanic/Latino
 White/Caucasian Multi-racial

Thank you for sharing your opinions!

Student Survey — Elementary grades

This survey relates to various qualities of your school. Your views are important to help improve your school. Please respond honestly to each statement below — your responses will remain confidential.

This survey should take you about 10 minutes to complete. It uses a 5-point scale, with 1 meaning you “don’t agree at all” with the statement, and 5 meaning you “agree completely.” (Use the X when you don’t know or the statement does not apply.) Mark one number for each statement.

School District _____ Month of Year _____

School Name _____ Grades Served by School _____

Think about your school as you read each statement below. Then **circle** the number that best describes how much you agree with that statement.

How much do you agree with this statement?	Don't Know/ Not Applicable	Don't agree at all	Agree slightly	Agree moderately	Agree mostly	Agree completely
1. My school has goals that students understand.	X	1	2	3	4	5
2. The main purpose of my school is to help students learn.	X	1	2	3	4	5
3. Teachers make it clear what I am supposed to learn.	X	1	2	3	4	5
4. I know why it is important for me to learn what is being taught.	X	1	2	3	4	5
5. My classes challenge me to think and solve problems.	X	1	2	3	4	5
6. Teachers expect all students to work hard.	X	1	2	3	4	5
7. Teachers expect all students to succeed, no matter who they are.	X	1	2	3	4	5
8. My classes are interesting.	X	1	2	3	4	5
9. Teachers give me challenging work.	X	1	2	3	4	5
10. My teachers make learning interesting by teaching in different ways.	X	1	2	3	4	5
11. Students feel free to express their ideas and opinions.	X	1	2	3	4	5
12. My teachers help me when I don't understand something.	X	1	2	3	4	5
13. Teachers give students extra help if it is needed.	X	1	2	3	4	5
14. My teachers encourage me.	X	1	2	3	4	5
15. Students are given many chances to show what we have learned.	X	1	2	3	4	5
16. Tests and quizzes are related to the material and ideas we are supposed to learn.	X	1	2	3	4	5
17. Grades are given in a fair manner.	X	1	2	3	4	5
18. Discipline problems are handled fairly.	X	1	2	3	4	5
19. Teachers are constantly trying to become better teachers.	X	1	2	3	4	5
20. The adults in my school work well together.	X	1	2	3	4	5

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How much do you agree with this statement?	Don't Know/ Not Applicable	Don't agree at all	Agree slightly	Agree moderately	Agree mostly	Agree completely
21. My teachers understand me.	X	1	2	3	4	5
22. The adults in my school show respect for me.	X	1	2	3	4	5
23. Students respect those who are different from them.	X	1	2	3	4	5
24. The teachers and other adults in my school show respect for each other.	X	1	2	3	4	5
25. I feel safe when I am at school.	X	1	2	3	4	5
26. Students have many chances to participate in school activities (e.g., sports, clubs).	X	1	2	3	4	5
27. The school environment makes it easy to learn.	X	1	2	3	4	5
28. The adults who work at my school care about all students, not just a few.	X	1	2	3	4	5
29. My teachers will contact my family if I am having problems learning.	X	1	2	3	4	5
30. Many parents and adults from the community come and help at the school.	X	1	2	3	4	5

Comments or response to optional question(s):

To complete this survey, please answer several questions about yourself (*check one for each question*).

- A. What grade are you in? 1st 2nd 3rd 4th 5th 6th
 Ungraded Not sure
- B. What is your gender? Boy Girl
- C. What is your primary race/ethnicity? Amer. Indian/Native Amer. African American/Black
 Asian/Pacific Islander Hispanic/Latino
 White/Caucasian Multi-racial

Thank you for sharing your opinions!

Parent/Community Survey

This survey relates to various qualities of your school. Your views are important to help improve your school. Please respond honestly to each statement below — your responses will remain confidential.

This survey should take you about 10 minutes to complete. It uses a 5-point scale, with 1 meaning you “don’t agree at all” with the statement, and 5 meaning you “agree completely.” (Use the X when you don’t know or the statement does not apply.) Mark one number for each statement.

School District _____ Month of Year _____

School Name _____ Grades Served by School _____

Think about your school as you read each statement below. Then circle the number that best describes how much you agree with that statement.

How much do you agree with this statement?	Don't Know/ Not Applicable	Don't agree at all	Agree slightly	Agree moderately	Agree mostly	Agree completely
1. The school has a clearly defined purpose and mission.	X	1	2	3	4	5
2. I have a clear understanding of what the school is trying to accomplish.	X	1	2	3	4	5
3. I support the goals of the school.	X	1	2	3	4	5
4. The school's primary emphasis is improving student learning.	X	1	2	3	4	5
5. The school communicates its goals effectively to families and the community.	X	1	2	3	4	5
6. All students in the school are expected to meet high standards.	X	1	2	3	4	5
7. Students understand what they are supposed to learn.	X	1	2	3	4	5
8. School work is meaningful and made relevant to students.	X	1	2	3	4	5
9. Teachers will do whatever it takes to help all students meet high academic standards.	X	1	2	3	4	5
10. Teachers make adjustments to meet individual student's needs.	X	1	2	3	4	5
11. Classes challenge students to think and solve problems.	X	1	2	3	4	5
12. Students receive detailed information about the work they do.	X	1	2	3	4	5
13. Teachers give students extra help if it is needed.	X	1	2	3	4	5
14. Grades are given in a fair manner.	X	1	2	3	4	5
15. Students respect those who are different from them.	X	1	2	3	4	5
16. The adults in the school show respect for all students.	X	1	2	3	4	5
17. Discipline problems are handled fairly.	X	1	2	3	4	5
18. School leaders act fairly and with integrity.	X	1	2	3	4	5
19. My child feels safe at school.	X	1	2	3	4	5

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How much do you agree with this statement?	Don't Know/ Not Applicable	Don't agree at all	Agree slightly	Agree moderately	Agree mostly	Agree completely
20. The school environment is conducive to learning	X	1	2	3	4	5
21. School staff listen carefully when I express my opinions and concerns.	X	1	2	3	4	5
22. Teachers are constantly trying to become better teachers.	X	1	2	3	4	5
23. The teachers and other adults in my school show respect for each other.	X	1	2	3	4	5
24. School leaders show they care about all students.	X	1	2	3	4	5
25. The adults in my school work well together.	X	1	2	3	4	5
26. The school will contact the families of students who are struggling academically.	X	1	2	3	4	5
27. There is frequent, two-way communication between school staff and families.	X	1	2	3	4	5
28. I feel welcome when I visit the school.	X	1	2	3	4	5
29. The school works with many community organizations to support its students.	X	1	2	3	4	5
30. Many parents and adults from the community come and help at the school.	X	1	2	3	4	5

Please provide some background information about yourself (check one for each).

A. Gender: Male Female

B. Your race/ethnicity: American Indian/Native Amer. African American/Black
 Asian/Pacific Islander Hispanic/Latino
 White/Caucasian Multi-racial

C. Number of children in this school: 0 1 2 3 4 or more

D. Number of children under 18 living in your home: 0 1 2 3
 4 5 or more

E. Relationship to children in the school: Parent Relative Guardian Other

F. Main language spoken at home: English Spanish Cambodian
 Chinese Korean Russian
 Ukrainian Tagalog Vietnamese
 Another language

G. Frequency of visits to the school: Never Rarely Sometimes
 Often Very Often

