

*The Internal Coherence Framework: Creating the Conditions for  
Continuous Improvement in Schools*

# TOOLKIT

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CCT #2

**THE  
INTERNAL  
COHERENCE  
FRAMEWORK**

Creating the Conditions  
for Continuous Improvement  
in Schools

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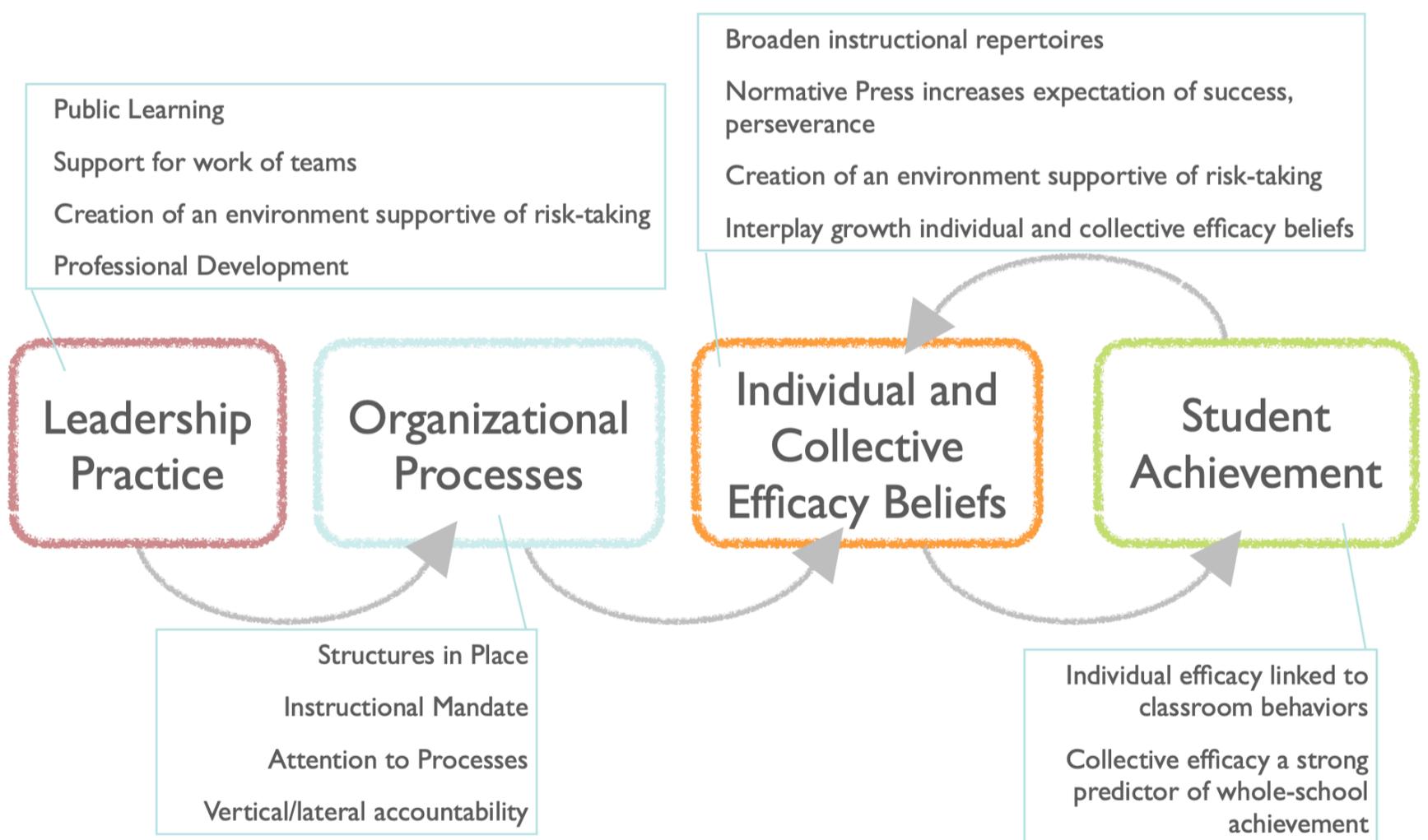
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FOREWORD BY RICHARD F. ELMORE

# THEORY OF ACTION

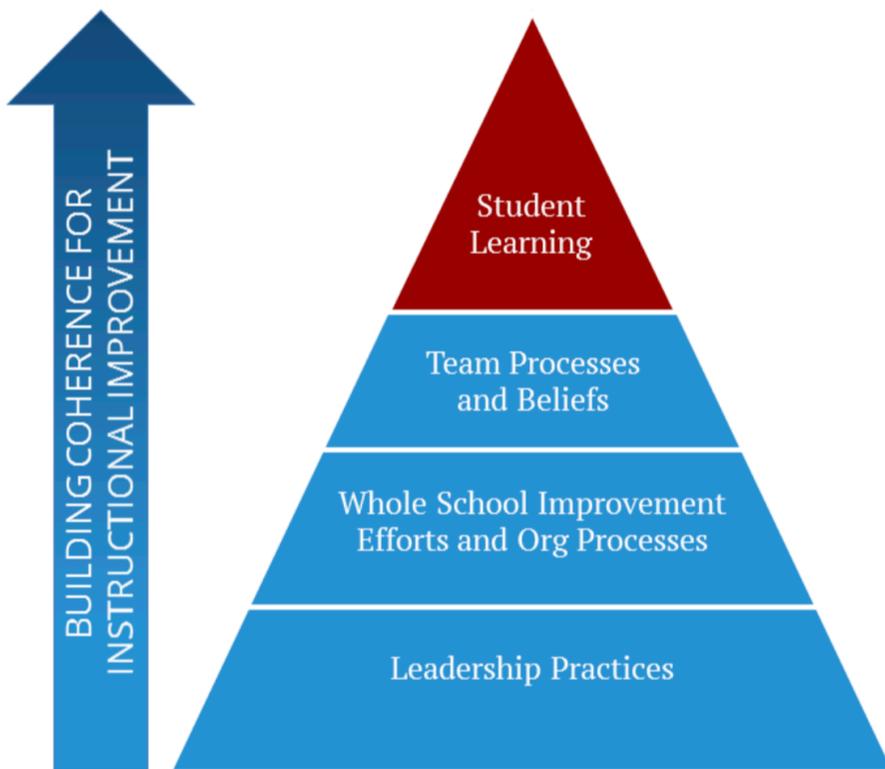
The Internal Coherence Framework (below) displays the relationships between the Leadership Practices for Instructional Improvement, Organizational Processes, and Efficacy Beliefs domains and their connection to student achievement.

The Internal Coherence Framework and essential practices are designed to form an *actionable* approach to increase capacity from any starting point. This framework, which is based on evidence about the essential practices, processes, and conditions for enhancing teaching and learning at scale, can help leaders develop a comprehensive approach to improvement.



## Guiding Principles:

- Internal coherence should be built around the instructional core.
- Improvement is a challenge of learning, not implementation.
- Mastery experiences can change beliefs and behavior.
- Clinical practices and tools make research actionable.



## THEORY OF ACTION

BCII schools will improve instruction, student learning and student achievement by:

### Student Learning

Teachers experiment with new ways of interacting with content and students to raise the level of academic tasks and realize the school's instructional vision.

### Team Processes and Beliefs

Teacher teams work to realize instructional vision through discussions and evaluation of student work, assessment data and curriculum and plan instruction.

### Whole School Improvement Efforts and Org Processes

Faculty has clear strategy for realizing vision and coordinate curriculum, instruction and initiatives with this focus.

### Leadership Practices

Leaders articulate a clear vision for instruction, create supportive learning conditions, hold teachers accountable for realizing vision.

### Building Coherence for Instructional Improvement

Based on the work of R. Elmore, M. Foreman & L. Stosich

## Internal Coherence Framework

# DEVELOPMENTAL RUBRIC

This rubric, designed by Richard Elmore, focuses on the practices, conditions and beliefs that research associates with schools that improve instruction and student learning. It is designed to illustrate concretely how educators develop their ability to enact an instructional improvement strategy, rather than measuring the quality of school conditions in and of themselves. It is a preliminary tool for schools to self-assess their existing level of internal coherence before they receive their Internal Coherence Survey data.

DEVELOPMENTAL RUBRIC FOR SCHOOL IMPROVEMENT - DRAFT COPY				© RICHARD ELMORE, 2011, USE WITH PERMISSION ONLY
DOMAIN/LEVEL	BEGINNING	EMERGENT	FUNCTIONAL	EXEMPLARY
<b>INSTRUCTIONAL LEADERSHIP</b>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>▶ Leadership Lacks Clear Instructional Focus</li> <li>▶ Teachers Perceive Leaders Lack Instructional Knowledge</li> <li>▶ Leadership Lacks Clear Practice for Routinely Observing and Monitoring Instruction</li> </ul>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>▶ Developing Instructional Focus, but Lack of Shared Understanding Among Teachers</li> <li>▶ Administrators Demonstrate Limited Modeling of Instructional Knowledge</li> <li>▶ Observation Practice Limited</li> </ul>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>▶ Instructional Focus Clearly Communicated to Teachers, Students</li> <li>▶ Administrators Routinely Model Their Own Knowledge of Instructional Practice With Teachers</li> <li>▶ Routine, Visible Administrators' Observational Practice</li> </ul>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>▶ Instructional Focus Present in Language and Practice</li> <li>▶ Administrators Routinely Model Their Own Knowledge, and Teachers Provide Feedback to Administrators on their Practice</li> <li>▶ Routine, Visible Involvement of Administrators and Teachers in Observation Practice</li> </ul>
<b>ORGANIZATIONAL STRUCTURE AND PROCESS</b>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>▶ Absence of Clear Structures, Processes for Instructional Decisions</li> <li>▶ Instructional Practice Absent or Episodic in Interactions Between Administrators and Teachers</li> </ul>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>▶ Clear Team Structure for Instructional Decisions</li> <li>▶ Variable Capacity of Teams in Processes for Effective Collaboration</li> <li>▶ Variable Capacity of Teams to Make Instructional Decisions</li> <li>▶ Variable Engagement of Teams in Decisions about Instruction and Conduct</li> </ul>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>▶ Clear Team Structure with Clear Direction for Team Work</li> <li>▶ Administrators Monitor Team Collaborative Process</li> <li>▶ Consistent Capacity of Teams to Make Instructional Decisions</li> <li>▶ Clear Ground-rules and Consistent Understanding of Teams' Role in Decisions</li> </ul>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>▶ Clear Structure, Direction for Team Work, with Strong Coordination Across Teams</li> <li>▶ Rotating Team Leadership</li> <li>▶ Routine Teacher Leadership of School-Wide Activities</li> </ul>
<b>LEADERSHIP FOR LEARNING</b>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>▶ Faculty Perceive Emphasis on Hierarchy, Power Differential</li> <li>▶ Faculty Fear Consequences for Experimentation, Admitting Mistakes or Questioning Current Practice</li> <li>▶ Weak or Non-Existent Supports for Teachers Struggling with Instructional Practice</li> </ul>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>▶ Leaders Developing Ability to Facilitate and Solicit Input From Faculty, Whole-School and Team Contexts</li> <li>▶ Limited Faculty Engagement in Candid Discussion of Individual or Collective Performance</li> <li>▶ Developing System of Supports for Areas of Instructional Weakness</li> </ul>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>▶ Administrators Routinely Model Their Own Learning Process With Teachers</li> <li>▶ Routine Faculty Engagement in Evaluative Discussion of Individual and Collective Performance</li> <li>▶ Established Professional Learning Program Linked to Individual Needs and School Goals</li> </ul>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>▶ Administrators and Teachers Routinely Engage in Shared Professional Learning Around Next Level of Work for the School</li> <li>▶ Administrators and Teachers Routinely Adapt Professional Development Offerings to Needs of the Faculty, as they Emerge</li> </ul>
<b>COLLECTIVE UNDERSTANDING OF EFFECTIVE PRACTICE</b>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>▶ Individual Teachers Monitor Effects of Instructional Practice</li> <li>▶ Existing Information Sources are Underutilized, or Not Used at All</li> <li>▶ Weak or Non-Existent Use by Administrators of Information on School Improvement Strategies or Student Learning</li> </ul>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>▶ Individual Teachers Determine How and Whether to Engage in Peer Observation</li> <li>▶ Administrators and Teachers Use Published Information on Student Learning for Decisions About Instruction and Improvement Strategy</li> <li>▶ Administrators Provide Feed-back to Teachers and Teams based on Published Sources</li> </ul>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>▶ Established System for Teacher Peer Observation</li> <li>▶ Administrators, Teachers Develop and Use Multiple Sources of Information on Student Learning, Keyed to Instructional Focus</li> <li>▶ Administrators Routinely Observe, Provide Feedback, and Model Use of Multiple Sources for Teachers and Teams</li> </ul>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>▶ Administrators, Teachers Routinely Adapt the Information They Gather on Student Learning to the Instructional Focus of the School</li> <li>▶ Teachers and Administrators Routinely Provide Feedback to Each Other on Strengths and Weaknesses of Instructional Focus</li> </ul>
<b>EFFICACY AND ACCOUNTABILITY</b>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>▶ Administrators Monitor and Supervise Individual Teachers</li> </ul>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>▶ Administrators Supervise and Monitor Team Instructional Decisions</li> <li>▶ Administrators Monitor Impact of Team Decisions on Instructional Practice</li> </ul>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>▶ Teams Make Collective Instructional Decisions within Instructional Focus</li> <li>▶ Teams Monitor Commitments to Specific Instructional Changes Through Strategies Including Peer Observation</li> </ul>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>▶ Teams and Administrators Routinely Participate in (Re)Setting Instructional Focus Based on Observations and Other Data</li> <li>▶ Administrators and Teams Make Binding Commitments to Specific Actions for Instructional Practice and Support</li> </ul>

## *Internal Coherence Framework*

# SURVEY

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Designed by Elmore, Forman, Stosich, with contributions from Isaksen, this teacher survey assesses a school's existing capacity to leverage an instructional intervention for schoolwide improvement. It measures conditions and processes such as psychological safety, teachers' involvement in instructional decisions, and a principal's support for teams. Each survey item is based on specific actions school leaders can take to improve their collective practice. The survey, learning experiences and practices are designed to be mutually reinforcing.











## Item Sources

Items 1-5 and 9-14 are adapted from "Is Yours a Learning Organization?" by D. A. Garvin, A. C. Edmondson & F. Gino, 2008, Harvard Business Review, March, p. 109-16.

Items 7 and 15-16 are from Consortium on Chicago School Research. (2009). Survey of Chicago public schools - high school teacher edition [Online survey and Website]. Chicago, IL. Reprinted with permission from the Consortium on Chicago School Research and the University of Chicago Urban Education Institute.

Items 24-28 are from "A Theoretical and Empirical Investigation of Teacher Collaboration for School Improvement and Student Achievement in Public Elementary Schools," by Y. L. Goddard, R. D. Goddard & M. Tschannen-Moran, 2007, Teachers College Record, 109, p. 877-96.

Items 31-35 are from "A Theoretical and Empirical Analysis of the Measurement of Collective Efficacy: The Development of a Short Form," by R. D. Goddard, 2002, Educational and Psychological Measurement, 62, p. 97-110.

Item 36 is from Bay area school reform collaborative. (2002). Bay area school reform collaborative - teacher survey. [Online survey and Website.] Oakland, CA. Retrieved May 31, 2011 from [http:// www.stanford.edu/group/suse-crc/cgi-bin/drupal/sites/default/files/survey/BASRC-teacher-survey2002.pdf](http://www.stanford.edu/group/suse-crc/cgi-bin/drupal/sites/default/files/survey/BASRC-teacher-survey2002.pdf).

Items 38-46 were developed with assistance from Susan F. Henry, Educational Consultant on Teacher Collaboration. (2010).

All other items were developed for the Internal Coherence project by Michelle L. Forman, Richard F. Elmore, and Elizabeth Leisy Stosich.

# ANNOTATED SURVEY

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This overview of the Internal Coherence Survey shows which items fall under which domains and factors. You can use this guide to identify specific chapters where you can learn more about the practices and processes described in the survey.

## **Internal Coherence Survey Domains and Factors**

### ***Domain 1: Leadership for Instructional Improvement***

#### ***Factor 1: Leadership for Learning***

The principal at this school invites input from faculty in discussions about teaching and learning.

The principal at this school asks probing questions about teaching and learning.

The principal at this school listens attentively.

The principal at this school encourages multiple points of view.

The principal at this school acknowledges his / her own limitations with respect to knowledge or expertise.

The principal at this school is knowledgeable about effective instructional practices.

The principal communicates a clear vision for teaching and learning at our school.

The principal at this school is directly involved in helping teachers address instructional issues in their classrooms.

#### ***Factor 2: Psychological Safety***

People in this school are eager to share information about what does and does not work.

Making mistakes is considered part of the learning process in our school.

If I make a mistake at this school, it will not be held against me.

In this school, teachers feel comfortable experimenting with untried teaching approaches, even if they may not work.

In this school, it is easy to speak up about what is on your mind.

People in this school are usually comfortable talking about problems and disagreements about teaching and learning.

#### ***Factor 4: Professional Development***

My professional development experiences this year have been closely connected to my school's improvement plan.

My professional development experiences this year have included enough time to think carefully about, try, and evaluate new ideas.

My professional development experiences this year have been valuable to my practice as a teacher.

My professional development experiences this year have been designed in response to the learning needs of the faculty, as they emerge.

My professional development experiences this year have included follow-up support as we implement what we have learned.

## ***Domain II: Whole-school Processes for Instructional Improvement***

### ***Factor 1: Collaboration around an Improvement Strategy***

Our school has an improvement plan, of which we are all aware.

We focus our whole-school improvement efforts on clear, concrete steps.

We coordinate curriculum, instruction and learning materials with our school improvement plan.

The programs or initiatives we implement connect clearly to our school improvement plan.

### ***Factor 2: Teachers' Involvement in Instructional Decisions***

Teachers in this school work collectively to plan school improvement.

Teachers in this school work collectively to select instructional methods and activities.

Teachers in this school work collectively to evaluate curriculum and programs.

Teachers in this school work collectively to determine professional development needs and goals.

Teachers in this school work collectively to plan professional development activities.

As a full faculty, we work toward developing a shared understanding of effective instructional practices.

As a full faculty, we regularly revisit and revise our thinking about the most effective instructional practices we can use with our students.

## ***Domain III: Teams as Levers for Instructional Improvement***

### ***Factor 4: Shared Understanding of Effective Practice (Team)***

How often have you worked with members of your team to discuss teaching decisions based on student work?

How often have you worked with members of your team to discuss teaching decisions based on student assessment data?

How often have you worked with members of your team to evaluate curricular or assessment materials?

How often have you worked with members of your team to discuss lesson plans or specific instructional practices?

### ***Factor 5: Support for Team***

The principal at this school provides teacher teams with the right balance of direction and independence.

The principal at this school gives teacher teams a clear and meaningful purpose for their time together.

The principal at this school provides adequate time for teacher teams to meet.

The principal at this school ensures that teacher meeting time is protected and maintained consistently throughout the year.

The principal at this school supports teacher teams in following through on instructional decisions made by the group.

### ***Factor 6: Team Processes***

Our team meetings have an agenda, which we do our best to follow.

There is always someone who has the responsibility of guiding or facilitating our team discussions.

When our team makes a decision, all teachers on the team take responsibility for following through.

Our team meetings include productive debate.

All members of the team are actively involved in our collective learning.

Team meetings connect to each other and the overarching purpose for team work.

There is a clear connection between our team's work and the school improvement plan.

#### ***Domain IV: Teachers' Efficacy Beliefs***

##### ***Factor 1: Individual Efficacy***

How confident are you that you can craft good questions for your students?

How confident are you that you can use a variety of assessment strategies?

How confident are you that you can provide an alternative explanation or example when students are confused?

How confident are you that you can provide appropriate challenges for very capable students?

How confident are you that you can differentiate instruction for individual students?

##### ***Factor 2: Collective Efficacy***

Teachers in this school are confident they will be able to motivate their students.

Teachers in this school have the skills needed to produce meaningful student learning.

If a child doesn't learn something the first time, teachers will try another way.

Teachers in this school believe that every child can learn.

Teachers in this school are skilled in various methods of teaching.

Teachers in this school have what it takes explore new instructional approaches to help underperforming students meet standards.

# ESSENTIAL PRACTICES

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These are actionable ways to raise the level of learning for adults and students in schools and systems. These practices include methods for assessment of your organization's current capacity using the Internal Coherence Survey, committing to shared learning as a leadership team, developing a vision for teaching and learning, and assessing the potential of teams' instructional conversations to realize a vision. Each of the essential practices documents include practical, concrete steps for engaging in the leadership, organizational, and instructional changes necessary for improving students' opportunities to learn.

# ESSENTIAL PRACTICE: COMMITTING TO SHARED LEARNING

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Focusing on collective learning in teams, rather than only individual learning, is essential for schoolwide improvement. Developing and regularly revisiting learning commitments can help practitioners work together and encourage contributions from all members of the group. The commitments can foster shared learning among individuals with different perspectives, experiences, roles, and preferences for collaborating. The act of discussing and then agreeing to collective learning commitments is a critical aspect of this practice. Without the learning commitments, the open sharing and reflection will have no effect on the way the team functions or the cultural norms being formed. By translating the learning needs of the individual team members into implications for how the team will operate, team members make a commitment to work differently and with an intentional focus on everyone's learning.

**Objective:** Develop collective learning commitments, or cultural norms, that describe how you will support the learning of all members of the team.

**Time:** 45 minutes

## 1. Individual Write [5 minutes]

Respond to these questions first individually:

- What supports your individual learning?
- What shuts down your individual learning?

## 2. Group Share [15 minutes]

Each member of the group takes a turn sharing what circumstances support and shut down their individual learning. Each then considers the implications for their work in the team setting. The facilitator writes the group's responses related to the following questions:

- What supports and what shuts down your individual learning?
- What team conditions would support or shut down your learning in the group?

## 3. Chart Commitments [15 minutes]

As a group, discuss this question: What are the implications for how your group will operate? Chart (i.e., write down on large paper for everyone to view) the commitments you will make to each other to foster group learning. Synthesize, prioritize, and document the most important commitments.

## 4. Plan [10 minutes]

As a group, discuss the following question: When and how will you revisit these commitments to support your learning over time? Chart a few next steps or capture your plans in the notes from the meeting, and schedule a time to return to your commitments in future meetings.

# ESSENTIAL PRACTICE: CREATING AN AMBITIOUS VISION FOR THE INSTRUCTIONAL CORE

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To create the vision in this essential practice, educators need to include all three components of the instructional core. They should articulate not only the desired student outcomes but also how they expect to see teachers interacting with students and particular types of content.

**Objective:** Develop an ambitious vision for teaching and learning anchored in the instructional core.

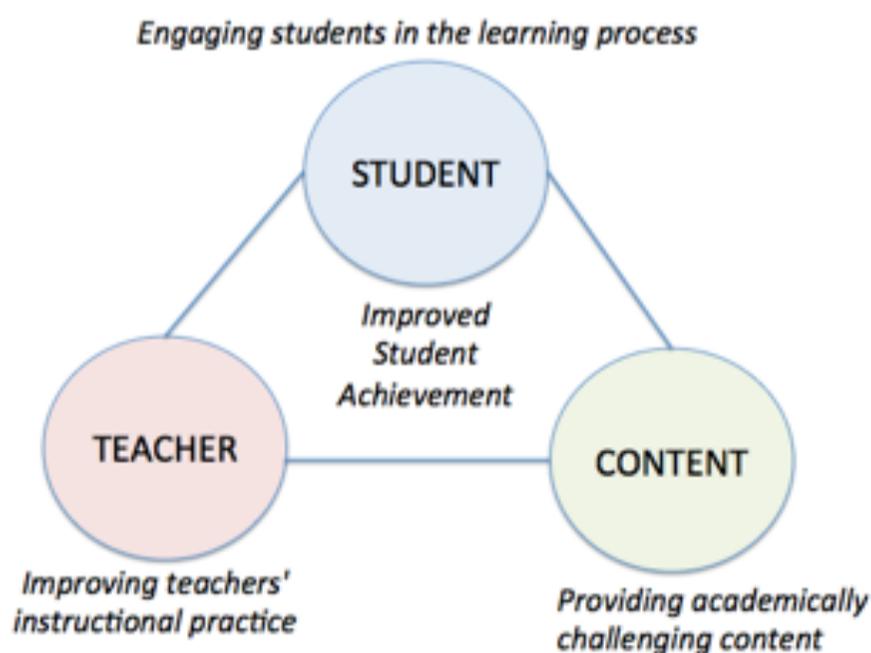
**Time:** 60 minutes

## 1. Identify a Focus [10 minutes]

As a group, discuss the following question: What are you trying to improve in terms of instruction and student learning? Spend up to ten minutes collecting ideas about what your school is trying to achieve – goals related to student learning. If there are several possible goals, write them all down, and then come to a consensus about where to focus your attention for the next few rounds. If possible, return to the other goals later. Commit your focus to chart paper.

## 2. If We Succeed, What Will We See in Our Classrooms? [20 minutes]

Draw the triangle for the instructional core on chart paper. Using markers or sticky notes, write down your ideas for what classrooms will look like if you succeed in your goals. Align your written ideas with each component of the instructional core and the interactions between these components, using the following prompts:



If we succeed...

- What will we see students doing?
- What will we see teachers doing?
- What will the instructional content look like?
- How will students interact with teachers? How will students interact with content? How will teachers interact with content.

### **3. Assessing the Audacity of Our Vision** [20 minutes]

After committing your vision for the instructional core to paper, discuss the following questions:

- Is our vision ambitious enough that it requires adults and students to learn to work in new ways?
- Would making this vision a reality result in meaningful improvements in student learning?
- Is our vision observable and grounded in the instructional core? Would we be able to see if students and teachers were working in ways that reflected this vision?
- Be specific. What would our vision look like? What would it feel like? What learning would it require? How would it improve learning?

### **4. Revise and Commit to Paper** [10 minutes]

In light of your discussion, revise your vision for the instructional core, and write your final ideas on chart paper. Post your final ideas for each component of the instructional core – teacher, student, content – and the interactions between them.

# ESSENTIAL PRACTICE: ANALYZING CURRENT ORGANIZATIONAL CAPACITY

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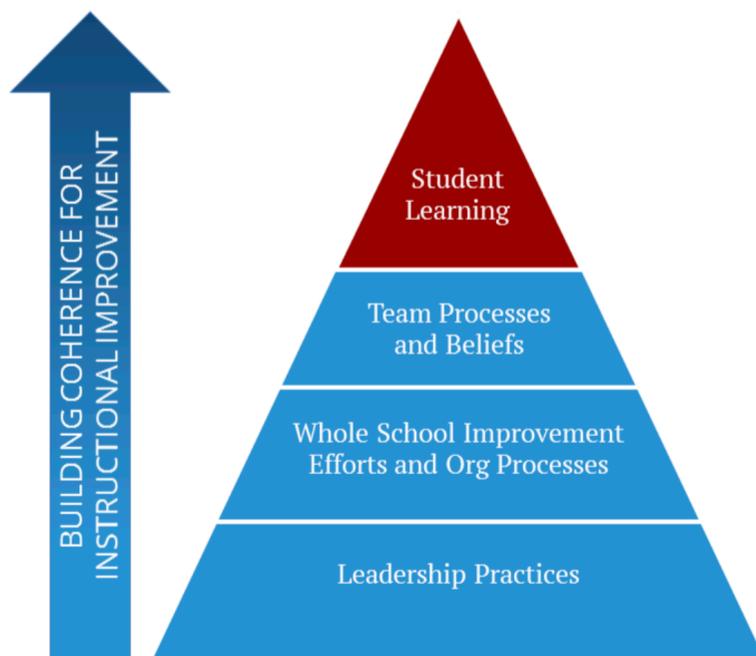
This essential practice is designed to be used with an Internal Coherence Survey Profile created for an individual school and can be used annually to reflect on the current capacity in the organization and to understand the changes over time. Taking time to reflect on the detailed information provided by the Internal Coherence Survey Profile can help schools identify organizational strengths and areas for growth that leadership teams can target when they are developing plans for realizing their vision for instruction.

**Objective:** Reflect on the data in your school's Internal Coherence Survey Profile

**Time:** 60 minutes

## 1. Assessing your Organization's Capacity [45 minutes]

Discuss how the Internal Coherence Survey Profile and your knowledge of your organization relate to your plans for improving instruction and student learning. Consider using the figure below to support this discussion. Have a facilitator record the group's responses on chart paper or a shared document, adding to and revising the group's initial ideas.



## THEORY OF ACTION

BCII schools will improve instruction, student learning and student achievement by:

### Student Learning

Teachers experiment with new ways of interacting with content and students to raise the level of academic tasks and realize the school's instructional vision.

### Team Processes and Beliefs

Teacher teams work to realize instructional vision through discussions and evaluation of student work, assessment data and curriculum and plan instruction.

### Whole School Improvement Efforts and Org Processes

Faculty has clear strategy for realizing vision and coordinate curriculum, instruction and initiatives with this focus.

### Leadership Practices

Leaders articulate a clear vision for instruction, create supportive learning conditions, hold teachers accountable for realizing vision.

### Building Coherence for Instructional Improvement

Based on the work of R. Elmore, M. Foreman & L. Stosich

### **Teachers**

- How confident are teachers in the ability of the faculty to support student learning?
- Are there specific areas in which teachers feel more or less confident about the abilities of the faculty (e.g., supporting underperforming students)?

### **Teams**

- How do teachers view their teacher teams?
- Do teachers see these teams as supporting their learning?
- How do administrators support the work of teams?

### **Faculty**

- Is there a clear strategy in place for improving instruction and student learning?
- Are teachers involved in instructional decisions at the school?
- Do teachers view professional development opportunities as meaningful?

### **Administrators**

- How are administrators supporting teacher learning?
- Do teachers feel safe experimenting with new approaches?
- How will administrators involve teachers in developing shared expectations for realizing instructional vision?

## **2. Summarizing Your Organization's Capacity [15 minutes]**

As a group, document a summary of observations from the Internal Coherence Survey Profile on chart paper or a shared document. Discuss with the group the following questions:

- What are our current organizational strengths? How might we take advantage of them when we develop our strategy?
- What areas for growth will we need to address to reach our improvement goals? What challenges should we be aware of when we develop our strategy?

# ESSENTIAL PRACTICE: DEVELOPING A STRATEGY FOR INSTRUCTIONAL IMPROVEMENT

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This practice requires your leadership team to have developed a vision for the improvements in instruction and student learning you want to see in your organization and to have done some form of assessment of the existing areas of capacity and challenge in the organization, such as administering the Internal Coherence Survey or using the Internal Coherence Developmental Rubric. The practice is designed to help your leadership team identify the specific learning you need to reach your vision and the specific structures, practices, and processes that you can put in place to support this learning.

**Objective:** Develop a strategy for reaching your vision for the instructional core that both draws on and strengthens your organization's existing capacity for improving teaching and learning at scale.

**Time:** 1 hour, 30 minutes

## 1. Revisit Your Vision [10 minutes]

Review your vision together as a team. How do you hope to see students and teachers engaging with content? Use the document you created to describe your vision to support you in speaking about the specific changes you expect to see as they relate to teachers, students, and content.

## 2. Individual Reflection [5 minutes]

Consider how teachers are currently engaging with students around content. What do teachers need to learn to realize your vision? On separate sticky notes, write each instructional approach or idea that your teachers would need to learn.

## 3. Group Share: Building a Learning Bridge [20 minutes]

Each member of the group shares their sticky notes about what teachers need to learn to realize the vision for the instructional core and why. Place the sticky notes about what the teachers need to learn as a bridge between the current work of the organization and the vision for the instructional core.

## 4. Prioritize and Map Your Strategy for Instructional Improvement [30 minutes]

In light of your understanding of the learning that is necessary and the current capacity of your organization, create a strategy map that addresses each element below (have a facilitator record the team's responses):

- the specific learning experiences adults will need to realize your vision
- where this learning will happen
- who will support this learning
- how these learning opportunities are connected

## **5. Assess and Revise Your Strategy** [15 minutes]

Discuss the questions below to revise and strengthen your strategy for improving instruction and student learning. Again, have a facilitator record the responses.

- Does our strategy have a clear focus? Are there too many areas of focus?
- Is the strategy tightly connected to the ways teachers interact with students around content?
- Does our strategy have focus areas that are complementary and mutually reinforcing?
- Does it provide opportunities for teachers to deepen their knowledge of content and pedagogy?
- Does our strategy foster ownership among the faculty?

## **6. Reflect** [10 minutes]

What are your next steps for putting your plan into action? When and how will you revisit and revise this strategy as you move forward? Again, have a facilitator record the responses.

# ESSENTIAL PRACTICE: CHARTING THE DEPTH AND RELEVANCE OF INSTRUCTIONAL CONVERSATIONS

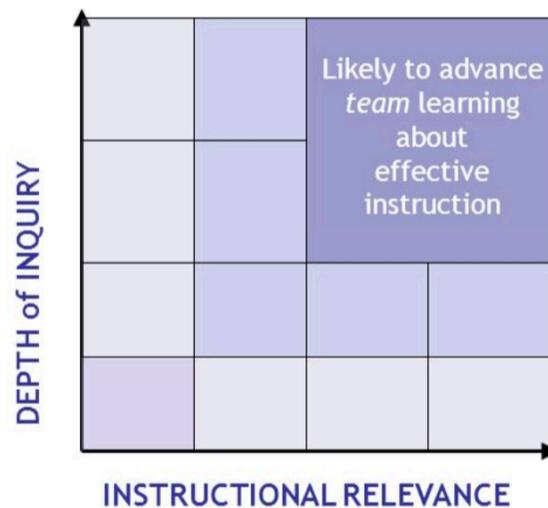
Teams can observe and analyze the extent to which their conversations show instructional relevance and depth of inquiry. Doing so can help teams understand whether they are optimally positioned to generate interdependent work.

**Objective:** Develop a shared understanding within your team about the actions you can take to engage in more instructionally relevant, inquiry-focused, and action-oriented instructional talk by analyzing a transcript of a typical team conversation against an analytic tool.

**Time:** 60 minutes

**Materials:** handouts or a large poster with Susan Henry’s Framework of Instructional Conversations (below), sticky notes, a transcript or other written notes from one of your team’s discussions

## A Framework of Instructional Conversations



### 1. Read and Annotate [10 minutes]

Individually, read the transcript from your team’s discussion. Using sticky notes or color coding, identify two or three conversational exchanges that represent evidence of the various points on the instructional-relevance axis and depth-of-inquiry axis of the Framework of Instructional Conversations.

### 2. Plot Data Points on Framework [15 minutes]

Together as a group, read aloud each example, and decide how to plot this example along each dimension on the framework.

### **3. Group Discussion** [25 minutes]

- To what extent does this team's conversation show instructional relevance?
  - What relationships between the elements of the instructional core, if any, do the participants address in their conversation?
  - To what degree were conversations based on particular interactions in specific contexts?
  - What might team members have said or done to raise the level of instructional relevance?
- To what extent does the team develop depth of inquiry in its discussion?
  - What knowledge-building processes are evident? How, if at all, does the team build and connect these processes to gain greater depth?
  - Where is there evidence of productive challenge or debate?
  - What might team members have said or done to increase the depth of the inquiry?

### **4. Group Reflection** [10 minutes]

- What did we notice in this particular excerpt from our team meeting?
- What do we think is the typical level of instructional relevance in our team conversations?
- What do we think is the typical level of depth of inquiry in our team conversations?
- What might we do differently to raise our potential for sustained team learning?

# ESSENTIAL PRACTICE: REFLECTING ON YOUR TEAM'S LEARNING

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This essential practice is designed to support groups of educators in generating efficacy for a collectively defined standard of instructional practice and process of improvement. By reflecting on both the classroom outcomes and the learning process at the close of an improvement cycle, leaders can direct faculty beliefs about their joint capability to enact high-quality academic tasks and continually deepen teaching and learning at their school.

**Objective:** Cultivate efficacy beliefs for ambitious instructional practice and ongoing instructional improvement.

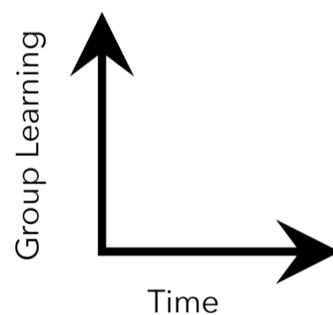
**Time:** 45 minutes

## 1. Reviewing Our Vision for Ambitious Instructional Practice [10 minutes]

- Have your team spend five minutes discussing its vision for instruction, using concrete and specific details to describe what your team was trying to do.
- Record the vision on paper.

## 2. Diagramming Progress [15 minutes]

- Using the diagram as an example, determine the appropriate time frame that would match when you started to work on this vision, and label the x-axis appropriately (i.e., days, weeks, or months, as needed). For the y-axis, consider the amount of learning that occurred, with high levels of learning indicated by the top of the axis.



- Give each person a few minutes to quietly think about the major accomplishments that were made during this time and that related to accomplishing the vision. Then, have each person write one accomplishment on a sticky note and place it near the appropriate time on the x-axis. Each person should individually determine how much learning occurred because of that accomplishment and place the sticky notes accordingly on the y-axis.
- Repeat the process above, but invite each person to think about any setbacks or challenges and to write them on sticky notes and place them accordingly.

### **3. Reflecting on Learning** [20 minutes]

Have your team reflect on and discuss the following questions about learning:

- For all the high points, how did we work together to achieve the gains we did? What processes did we use? Why did we see this as learning?
- For all the low points, what challenges did we face? What could we have done differently, if anything?
- Did any challenges result in high levels of learning?
- As a result of our work, what has changed in our school?

# FOUNDATIONAL LEARNING EXPERIENCE PROTOCOLS

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Unlike the essential practices which suggest a way to **do** the work of school improvement each year, foundational learning experiences enable practitioners to keep the big ideas front and center and are necessary for doing the essential practice well. The foundational learning experiences often set the stage for the essential practices and lead up to them, but practitioners can go back to review a foundational learning experience if they are having trouble with the essential practice.

# PROTOCOL: EMPLOYING CONSTRUCTIVE CHALLENGES

Conflict in teams is essential for supporting team members in challenging their assumptions, changing their beliefs and actions, and transforming their practice. Rushing to agreement can stifle creativity and innovation in teams, but subjecting possible solutions to a rigorous vetting process will take advantage of the divergent beliefs and practices of team members in engaging in **constructive challenge**, or pushing back on group members' thinking to advance the shared goals of the team.

**Time:** 35 minutes

## 1. Read and Reflect [10 minutes]

Read the six examples of constructive challenges below. Then discuss as a group: Have you or other members of your team engaged in these kinds of constructive challenges? How did others respond? How did the challenges influence your work as a group?

- **Question interpretations.** "I hear you saying...Is that right?"
- **Check assumptions.** "So does this mean you're assuming that they didn't get it the first time because...?"
- **Play devil's advocate, or push back on ideas.** "But if we keep scaffolding, will they ever learn to do it on their own?"
- **Surface underlying tensions.** "So on the one hand, Linda is concerned about ... But on the other, Derek fears this might ..."
- **Examine group hypothesis.** "OK, so what we're saying is that if we all ..., then we will see ..."
- **Reframe the group's collective understanding.** "So what we decided today is ..."

## 2. Trying On Ways of Talking [15 minutes]

The goal of constructive challenge is to clarify a person's reasoning behind their proposed solutions and to push the group's thinking forward in a productive manner. There are two main roles: a facilitator and recorder. The facilitator selects one person from the group to be the problem solver, and the remaining members of the team (except for the recorder) are the constructive challengers. The recorder takes notes about the dialogue between the problem solver and the challengers and should be prepared to offer overall reflections at the end of the activity, rather than contribute to the discussion.

**Scenario:** *You are working as a team of teachers and administrators to review data from a recent argumentative writing assignment. After reviewing the student work as a team, you notice two patterns. Students generally made clear claims and documented evidence from multiple sources. However, most students provided limited and sometimes unclear justifications for how the evidence supported their claims.*

Have the problem solver offer an initial solution to the problem identified in the scenario.

Next, have the others constructively challenge the proposed solution. They should use the methods suggested in Step 1 (e.g., play devil's advocate, question the solver's interpretation of the problem). Encourage them to use as many of the methods as they can.

Give the problem solver and challengers five to ten minutes to engage in this productive process.

### **3. Reflect and Debrief** [10 minutes]

At the end, have the recorder share out what they noticed about the discussion and what happened when these instances of constructive challenge took place. Discuss as a group:

- What was it like having that conversation?
- What felt familiar? Unfamiliar?
- Did engaging in constructive challenge influence the depth of your instructional conversation?
- How might we support this type of conversation in teams?

# PROTOCOL: ASSESSING THE CAPACITY OF YOUR ORGANIZATION WITH THE INTERNAL COHERENCE DEVELOPMENTAL RUBRIC

.....  
The goal of the rubric is to help you identify where you are as an organization along a developmental continuum, so that you may better leverage your strengths and identify next steps for building capacity for improvement.

**Objective:** Reflect on the current capacity of the school or school system to support improvements in teaching and learning.

**Time:** 15 minutes

## 1. Individual Reflection [5 minutes]

Independently review the rubric, focusing on the content of the key domains and how they develop over time.

Locate where your school or district falls on the rubric. Place a circle around statements that reflect the current conditions and practices in the organization.

## 2. Document Your Reflection [10 minutes]

Write down your responses to the following reflection questions:

- Why did you place your school or district where you did?
- What data or experiences influenced your decision?

# PROTOCOL: MAPPING YOUR ORGANIZATION

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This protocol can help schools or districts understand the connection or lack of connection between initiatives, departments, or activities occurring within the organization.

**Objective:** Reflect on the current capacity of the school or school system to support improvements in teaching and learning.

**Time:** 40 minutes

## 1. **Brainstorm** [10 minutes]

- What are all the improvement initiatives currently under way in your school? Write down each on a sticky note and place them on your poster.
- Consider each of these aspects of your school or system: curriculum focus, new standards, professional development, collaborative practices, interventions, and discipline

## 2. **Map** [20 minutes]

- On your poster that is now covered with sticky notes, group together the related initiatives, and develop categories. Draw arrows or other diagrams to indicate relationships among categories.
- How are the categories related to each other?
- Where are teachers learning to do new things?

## 3. **Infer** [10 minutes]

- What do you notice?
- What does it feel like to be a teacher in this school? A coach? An administrator?
- What do we say we are trying to achieve? Is this goal aligned with how we are currently working?

# PROTOCOL: RATING YOUR STRATEGY

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**Objective:** Use the rubric that follows to consider the degree to which your plan represents a strategy for realizing your vision for the instructional core. The purpose of analyzing the plan first as individuals and then as a team is to uncover different perspectives for discussion. This protocol will help you revisit and further strengthen your plan.

**Time:** 30 minutes

## 1. Individual Assessment [10 minutes]

Rate your school's strategy using the following rubric. Highlight where you think your strategy falls in each domain. What seems important to address?

## 2. Group Discussion [20 minutes]

- Go through the rubric, and share how you rated your strategy and why. Are there areas where you or your team members disagree with one another? Why?
- What areas would be important to strengthen?
- How might you make this strategy more effective for realizing your vision?

# PROTOCOL: USING HOPES, FEARS, AND COMMITMENTS FOR PEER OBSERVATION

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This protocol is most effective after your teams have clarified the purpose and value of observing one another's classrooms. You might also read about how other schools have approached peer observation in a matter that supports learning. As a facilitator, you can use the protocol to give the teachers a chance to be honest about how they're feeling. Then you can create an initial series of commitments to design a peer observation process that honors fears and supports their needs.

**Objective:** Develop a set of commitments to begin a psychologically safe practice of peer observation to advice the work of a team.

**Time:** 30 minutes

## 1. Individual Write: Hopes and Fears [5 minutes]

Each member records their responses to the following questions, using one sticky note for hopes and one for fears:

- If our team process for peer observation met or exceeded my hopes, what would or would not have happened?
- If our team process for peer observation confirmed my fears, what would or would not have happened?

## 2. Discussion [10 minutes]

Individuals can read their hopes and fears out loud, or people can post them on a wall anonymously and then have everyone read silently. Then, the team engages in a group discussion about the following questions:

- What do we notice about our hopes? What do we notice about our fears?

## 3. Group Commitments [15 minutes]

In this round, the team engages in a group discussion about creating a psychologically safe process for peer observations:

- How can we begin peer observation in a way that generates our hopes and avoids our fears?
- What will our process for peer observation be?
- What commitments will we make to each other as we begin peer observations?

Record these commitments on chart paper or a shared document.

Internal Coherence Framework

# DEVELOPMENTAL RUBRIC

DEVELOPMENTAL RUBRIC FOR SCHOOL IMPROVEMENT - DRAFT COPY					© RICHARD ELMORE, 2011, USE WITH PERMISSION ONLY
DOMAIN/LEVEL	BEGINNING	EMERGENT	FUNCTIONAL	EXEMPLARY	
INSTRUCTIONAL LEADERSHIP	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>Leadership Lacks Clear Instructional Focus</li> <li>Teachers Perceive Leaders Lack Instructional Knowledge</li> <li>Leadership Lacks Clear Practice for Routinely Observing and Monitoring Instruction</li> </ul>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>Developing Instructional Focus, but Lack of Shared Understanding Among Teachers</li> <li>Administrators Demonstrate Limited Modeling of Instructional Knowledge</li> <li>Observation Practice Limited</li> </ul>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>Instructional Focus Clearly Communicated to Teachers, Students</li> <li>Administrators Routinely Model Their Own Knowledge of Instructional Practice With Teachers</li> <li>Routine, Visible Administrators' Observational Practice</li> </ul>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>Instructional Focus Present in Language and Practice</li> <li>Administrators Routinely Model Their Own Knowledge, and Teachers Provide Feedback to Administrators on their Practice</li> <li>Routine, Visible Involvement of Administrators and Teachers in Observation Practice</li> </ul>	
ORGANIZATIONAL STRUCTURE AND PROCESS	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>Absence of Clear Structures, Processes for Instructional Decisions</li> <li>Instructional Practice Absent or Episodic in Interactions Between Administrators and Teachers</li> </ul>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>Clear Team Structure for Instructional Decisions</li> <li>Variable Capacity of Teams in Processes for Effective Collaboration</li> <li>Variable Capacity of Teams to Make Instructional Decisions</li> <li>Variable Engagement of Teams in Decisions about Instruction and Conduct</li> </ul>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>Clear Team Structure with Clear Direction for Team Work</li> <li>Administrators Monitor Team Collaborative Process</li> <li>Consistent Capacity of Teams to Make Instructional Decisions</li> <li>Clear Ground-rules and Consistent Understanding of Teams' Role in Decisions</li> </ul>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>Clear Structure, Direction for Team Work, with Strong Coordination Across Teams</li> <li>Rotating Team Leadership</li> <li>Routine Teacher Leadership of School-Wide Activities</li> </ul>	
LEADERSHIP FOR LEARNING	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>Faculty Perceive Emphasis on Hierarchy, Power Differential</li> <li>Faculty Fear Consequences for Experimentation, Admitting Mistakes or Questioning Current Practice</li> <li>Weak or Non-Existent Supports for Teachers Struggling with Instructional Practice</li> </ul>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>Leaders Developing Ability to Facilitate and Solicit Input From Faculty, Whole-School and Team Contexts</li> <li>Limited Faculty Engagement in Candid Discussion of Individual or Collective Performance</li> <li>Developing System of Supports for Areas of Instructional Weakness</li> </ul>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>Administrators Routinely Model Their Own Learning Process With Teachers</li> <li>Routine Faculty Engagement in Evaluative Discussion of Individual and Collective Performance</li> <li>Established Professional Learning Program Linked to Individual Needs and School Goals</li> </ul>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>Administrators and Teachers Routinely Engage in Shared Professional Learning Around Next Level of Work for the School</li> <li>Administrators and Teachers Routinely Adapt Professional Development Offerings to Needs of the Faculty, as they Emerge</li> </ul>	
COLLECTIVE UNDERSTANDING OF EFFECTIVE PRACTICE	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>Individual Teachers Monitor Effects of Instructional Practice</li> <li>Existing Information Sources are Underutilized, or Not Used at All</li> <li>Weak or Non-Existent Use by Administrators of Information on School Improvement Strategies or Student Learning</li> </ul>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>Individual Teachers Determine How and Whether to Engage in Peer Observation</li> <li>Administrators and Teachers Use Published Information on Student Learning for Decisions About Instruction and Improvement Strategy</li> <li>Administrators Provide Feed-back to Teachers and Teams based on Published Sources</li> </ul>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>Established System for Teacher Peer Observation</li> <li>Administrators, Teachers Develop and Use Multiple Sources of Information on Student Learning, Keyed to Instructional Focus</li> <li>Administrators Routinely Observe, Provide Feedback, and Model Use of Multiple Sources for Teachers and Teams</li> </ul>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>Administrators, Teachers Routinely Adapt the Information They Gather on Student Learning to the Instructional Focus of the School</li> <li>Teachers and Administrators Routinely Provide Feedback to Each Other on Strengths and Weaknesses of Instructional Focus</li> </ul>	
EFFICACY AND ACCOUNTABILITY	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>Administrators Monitor and Supervise Individual Teachers</li> </ul>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>Administrators Supervise and Monitor Team Instructional Decisions</li> <li>Administrators Monitor Impact of Team Decisions on Instructional Practice</li> </ul>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>Teams Make Collective Instructional Decisions within Instructional Focus</li> <li>Teams Monitor Commitments to Specific Instructional Changes Through Strategies Including Peer Observation</li> </ul>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>Teams and Administrators Routinely Participate in (Re)Setting Instructional Focus Based on Observations and Other Data</li> <li>Administrators and Teams Make Binding Commitments to Specific Actions for Instructional Practice and Support</li> </ul>	

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