

## KEY PRACTICE 1: USE DATA WELL

While districts, schools, and individual teachers use data and have been for some time now, there has been too much emphasis placed only on the performance of students on state assessments. While these data are important for strategic planning, they provide little ongoing guidance to teachers or administrators. Districts that have “moved their numbers” for all children have or are engaged in developing district-wide processes that allow for more collective use of relevant data to make smarter decisions, including the ongoing assessment of teaching and learning at the classroom, school, and district levels. These processes include the development, implementation, and ongoing use of teacher-developed formative assessments, and the use of grade-level/departmental/course, and vertical teams to collaboratively score these shared assessments and plan for shared instruction. They also include the use of building and district benchmark assessments. Fullan (2008) states that principals working directly with teachers in the use of data is more than twice as powerful as any other leadership dimension, and Leithwood and Jantzi (2008) found that the reliability for assessing student learning and district decision making was one critical characteristic of effective districts.

ROLE	<p style="text-align: center;"><b>CONSIDERATIONS</b></p> <p style="text-align: center;"><i>For Increasing the Performance of Students with Disabilities as Part of District-wide Improvement</i></p>
<p><b>STATE EDUCATION AGENCIES</b> (INCLUDING REGIONAL TA PROVIDERS)</p>	<p><b><i>To what degree do state education agencies (SEAs):</i></b></p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>▪ Use data to identify and respond to common needs related to student learning across areas (e.g., regions, zones, intermediate/cooperative service areas, districts) of the state?</li> <li>▪ Establish clear expectations for effective data use across SEA offices and departments, facilitating coherence and reducing fragmentation in the services and/or supports provided to districts?</li> <li>▪ Refine, redefine, or create new state systems of support focused on building the capacity of all districts in the state to improve instructional practice and student learning?</li> <li>▪ Establish mechanisms for providing high-quality and consistent support - including facilitation and professional development - to all districts in the state in the effective use of data to improve the learning of all students and groups of students, such as students with disabilities?</li> <li>▪ Provide tools/products/services that facilitate the effective use of data by all districts, schools, and teachers in improving instructional practice and student learning?</li> <li>▪ Ensure that state initiatives are targeted to providing support to underperforming districts and, at the same time, are applicable to and used by all districts in the state to continually support higher levels of learning for all students?</li> </ul>
<p><b>DISTRICTS &amp; THEIR SCHOOLS</b></p>	<p><b><i>To what degree do districts and their schools:</i></b></p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>▪ Establish clear expectations for effective data use at all levels of the system?</li> <li>▪ Use data to identify district, building, and classroom needs, and establish goals and performance targets at the district and school level?</li> <li>▪ Use data to measure the degree of implementation of strategies/actions, including professional development, to reach district/school-identified goals?</li> <li>▪ Use data to evaluate the effect of strategies/actions on student learning?</li> <li>▪ Require teachers and teacher teams to use data to establish instructional priorities and inform instructional practice on an ongoing basis?</li> <li>▪ Model and monitor the use of data to inform instructional decisions?</li> <li>▪ Provide support at all levels in the effective use of data to facilitate higher levels of learning for all students and groups of students, such as students with disabilities?</li> </ul>
<p><b>PARENTS &amp; FAMILIES</b></p>	<p><b><i>To what degree are parents/families empowered to:</i></b></p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>▪ Provide relevant information and feedback to district/school personnel on multiple dimensions (e.g., academic, physical, social-emotional) of their child’s progress and challenges?</li> <li>▪ Participate as members of the district or school leadership/data team?</li> <li>▪ Understand the importance of grade-level expectations in core content areas (e.g., reading, math)?</li> <li>▪ Understand the implications of how their child’s district/school/teacher(s) assesses what their child is learning and the level of learning?</li> <li>▪ Work with the district/school/teacher(s) to collect data on their child’s performance in designated areas?</li> </ul>

## KEY PRACTICE 2: FOCUS YOUR GOALS

When asked to describe the new initiatives undertaken in the last year or two, most teachers and administrators would list a litany of initiatives, often disconnected. If asked, "What are the district or school improvement initiatives?" most teachers and administrators often cannot articulate them. Reeves (2006) referred to this problem as "initiative fatigue," while Fullan (2008) calls this "repetitive change syndrome." If teachers, schools, and districts are to make improvement then they must be allowed and encouraged to focus on a few critical things well. As Patterson, et al. (2008) notes, "a few behaviors can drive a lot of change... Enormous influence comes from focusing on just a few vital behaviors." Leithwood and Jantzi (2008) recommend focusing the goals on student learning through the use of specific forms of instruction. They also recommend that the strategies be targeted on specific areas of low performance and phased in over time. Robinson (2008) identifies goal setting as one of the most critical school leadership responsibilities.

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<p><b>DISTRICTS &amp; THEIR SCHOOLS</b></p>	<p><b>To what degree do districts and their schools:</b></p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>▪ Use a data-driven needs assessment to develop a limited number of focused goals, and measureable strategies and actions, directly related to addressing the district's greatest needs related to instruction and achievement?</li> <li>▪ Reflect in district goals that the core work and priority of the district is to improve teaching and learning?</li> <li>▪ Ensure that all schools in the district align their work with district-established goals and strategies?</li> <li>▪ Identify goal setting as an important leadership responsibility?</li> <li>▪ Develop a single coherent district plan to reach district goals and require that each school develops a building plan aligned to district goals?</li> <li>▪ Make intentional decisions to align resources (fiscal, material, personnel) across the district to meet district-wide goals?</li> <li>▪ Screen, interview, select, and provide ongoing support to staff based on district-wide goals?</li> <li>▪ Engage the larger community, including board members, in establishing and sustaining a focus on district-wide goals for improving instruction and student learning?</li> </ul>
<p><b>PARENTS &amp; FAMILIES</b></p>	<p><b>To what degree are parents/families empowered to:</b></p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>▪ Contribute to the identification of focused district goals for improving instruction and achievement?</li> <li>▪ Support the district in reaching district-wide goals?</li> <li>▪ Participate in activities related to school-level strategies designed to reach district goals?</li> <li>▪ Understand the relationship between their child's classroom instruction and school-level strategies designed to reach district goals?</li> <li>▪ Offer feedback to school and district officials on the relevance of district goals and school-level strategies in meeting their child's instructional needs?</li> </ul>

# What Matters Most: Key Practices Guide

## KEY PRACTICE 3: SELECT AND IMPLEMENT SHARED INSTRUCTIONAL PRACTICES

Over the last several decades the research on effective instructional practices has demonstrated that “not all instructional strategies are equal” (See Marzano et. al., 2001). A recent synthesis of over 800 meta-analyses provides clear guidance in this area (Hattie, 2009). While most educators understand these findings, school districts have had limited success at implementing them. Both Leithwood and Jantzi (2008), and Fullan (2008) recommend focusing on specific effective instructional practices as a part of the district’s improvement process. Fullan (2008) says we need “relentless consistency” in the use of effective “non-negotiable” practices.

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<p><b>DISTRICTS &amp; THEIR SCHOOLS</b></p>	<p><b><i>To what degree do districts and their schools:</i></b></p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>▪ Establish and require the use of a district-wide standards-based curriculum aligned with district goals and priorities for instruction and student learning?</li> <li>▪ Take steps to build a common language among all staff for what constitutes high-quality instructional practice?</li> <li>▪ Ensure full access to challenging content aligned with rigorous standards for all students and student groups?</li> <li>▪ Ensure that the use of prevention/intervention strategies is implemented consistently as part of, rather than separate from, the district’s instructional program?</li> <li>▪ Require the use of ongoing assessment and progress monitoring to inform instruction at the district, school, and teacher-team level?</li> <li>▪ Provide for the system-wide use of collaboratively developed common classroom formative assessment as part of the instructional process?</li> <li>▪ Provide structured opportunities for schools to learn from each other, for principals to learn from each other, and for teachers to learn from each other?</li> </ul>
<p><b>PARENTS &amp; FAMILIES</b></p>	<p><b><i>To what degree are parents/families empowered to:</i></b></p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>▪ Support the delivery of instruction to their children in targeted areas?</li> <li>▪ Assist in the implementation of prevention/intervention strategies to support the instructional process?</li> <li>▪ Work with their child’s teacher(s) in using common classroom formative assessment to gather and provide feedback on their child’s level of understanding and application of content learned?</li> </ul>

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## KEY PRACTICE 4: IMPLEMENT DEEPLY

*Most of us can identify a whole host of initiatives that were undertaken with great fanfare but then implemented poorly. So the first step of any change initiative must begin with the realization that without consistent, rigorous follow through, there will be limited progress. As Bossidy and Charan (2002) have stated “leadership without the discipline of execution is incomplete and ineffective” (p. 34). All too often we achieve limited success and blame this on the intervention, while the real problem is the lack of full implementation. Reeves (2006) documents the fact that we should not expect to achieve the outcomes identified in the research until we reach a 90% implementation level.*

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<p><b>DISTRICTS &amp; THEIR SCHOOLS</b></p>	<p><b>To what degree do districts and their schools:</b></p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>▪ Require that identified instructional strategies chosen for improvement are implemented in every building and in every classroom across the district?</li> <li>▪ Define what full implementation of identified instructional strategies chosen for improvement looks like?</li> <li>▪ Require the use of aligned structures (i.e., teacher-based teams, school-level teams, district-level teams) that support shared implementation of focused instructional strategies?</li> <li>▪ Hold staff at all levels accountable for following through on focused instructional strategies, while providing them with multiple opportunities for practice and support?</li> <li>▪ Set expectations for the direct involvement of administrators (superintendents, principals) in ensuring that focused instructional practices are being implemented at a high level?</li> <li>▪ Ensure that professional development is directly related to the identified instructional practices chosen for improvement?</li> <li>▪ Actively maintain a focus on improving instructional practice and student learning?</li> </ul>
<p><b>PARENTS &amp; FAMILIES</b></p>	<p><b>To what degree are parents/families empowered to:</b></p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>▪ Participate in the implementation of focused instructional practices?</li> <li>▪ Understand the need for full implementation of focused instructional practices?</li> <li>▪ Understand what full implementation of focused instructional practices looks like?</li> <li>▪ Gauge their child’s performance in response to teachers’ implementation of focused instructional practices?</li> </ul>

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## KEY PRACTICE 5: MONITOR AND PROVIDE FEEDBACK AND SUPPORT

*Even if we are successful in our implementation there must be a system in place to provide feedback. To develop the system we must first be clear about defining what the practices look like when they are being implemented well. This description can take the form of a rubric, checklist, or protocol, but it must clearly describe what the behavior looks like when it's being done well. Once these indicators are defined, there needs to be a monitoring and reporting schedule that informs everyone in the system as to the progress being made. The collection and reporting of these data serve to provide a feedback loop to the staff on the overall implementation level of the strategies and is described by Reeves (2006) as an inquiry process that is the most critical component of district and school continuous improvement. The second component includes the implementation of student progress indicators that have been collaboratively developed and scored by the staff.*

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<p><b>DISTRICTS &amp; THEIR SCHOOLS</b></p>	<p><b><i>To what degree do districts and their schools:</i></b></p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>▪ Use a set of district-identified formative indicators for measuring district-wide implementation of focused improvement strategies and the effect of such implementation on student learning?</li> <li>▪ Use a consistent set of protocols/procedures for measuring district-wide implementation of focused improvement strategies and the effect of such implementation on student learning?</li> <li>▪ Monitor the degree of implementation of focused improvement strategies across the system?</li> <li>▪ Monitor the progress of students, and examine where and why students may be struggling?</li> <li>▪ Require central office personnel to actively monitor and provide feedback to principals and school-level teams on the implementation of focused instructional practices?</li> <li>▪ Require principals to actively monitor and provide feedback to teachers and teacher teams on the implementation of focused instructional practices?</li> <li>▪ Provide differentiated support, as needed, to schools and teachers in the implementation of focused instructional strategies?</li> <li>▪ Measure the effectiveness of feedback and/or differentiated support provided to schools and teachers?</li> </ul>
<p><b>PARENTS &amp; FAMILIES</b></p>	<p><b><i>To what degree are parents/families empowered to:</i></b></p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>▪ Provide feedback to the school or teacher(s) on their child's progress in relation to focused instructional strategies?</li> <li>▪ Work with the school or teacher(s) to monitor the implementation of focused instructional strategies and the effect of that implementation on their child's progress and learning?</li> </ul>

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## KEY PRACTICE 6: INQUIRE AND LEARN

While data help us prioritize and gauge progress, data-driven decision-making begins by asking fundamental questions (Reeves, 2002). At the grade-level, department, course, building, and district level, we need to be able to reflect on our collective and individual practice, answer important questions, and learn from the work we're doing. Important questions for teams to ask to support systems learning include the following:

- Where are the practices being implemented well?
- Why are they being successful?
- Where are the practices not being implemented well?
- Why are they being unsuccessful?

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<p><b>DISTRICTS &amp; THEIR SCHOOLS</b></p>	<p><b>To what degree do districts and their schools:</b></p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>▪ Foster and communicate a sense of urgency for continuous improvement and positive change in student learning?</li> <li>▪ Engage everyone in continually evaluating the effect of the district's focused instructional practices on district and school performance, and student learning?</li> <li>▪ Establish a decision-making process that supports shared learning across and among central office personnel, school personnel, and teacher team members?</li> <li>▪ Support principals in actively participating in collegial discussions around instruction and its effects on student learning?</li> <li>▪ Require principals to provide active oversight and coordination of the instructional program?</li> <li>▪ Provide resources to support district-wide professional learning focused on improving instructional practice and student learning?</li> <li>▪ Have established parameters for making decisions about needed changes to the district's improvement strategies?</li> </ul>
<p><b>PARENTS &amp; FAMILIES</b></p>	<p><b>To what degree are parents/families empowered to:</b></p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>▪ Provide information to the district, school, or teacher(s) about what is/is not working to improve their child's learning?</li> <li>▪ Contribute to evaluating the degree to which focused instructional strategies have been implemented and district-identified goals have been met?</li> <li>▪ Participate in district or school professional learning opportunities?</li> </ul>