| Core Function | School Leadership and Decision Making |

| Effective Practice | Focus the principal's role on building leadership capacity, achieving learning goals, and improving instruction |

Indicator: The principal compiles reports from classroom observations, showing aggregate areas of strength and areas that need improvement without revealing the identity of individual teachers. (5112)

Explanation: Showing aggregate areas of strength and areas that need improvement based on classroom observations is called a "patterns of practice" analysis. It is based on observations made relative to a set of indicators of effective practice so that the pattern shows the percent of teachers exhibiting each indicator. This is especially valuable information for planning professional development and for implementation of an indicator-based improvement plan.

Questions: Does your principal use indicators of effective practice in conducting classroom observations? Does the principal periodically aggregate the results to show patterns of practice? Is this information shared with the Leadership Team? With the entire instructional staff? Are the data used in planning professional development? In modifying the improvement plan?

School improvement plans (SIPs) should drive professional development for teachers. Professional development plans should be a part of the school improvement planning discussion and should focus on skills teachers need to support improvement areas identified during the needs assessment and plan development (Public Schools of North Carolina, 2013). The SIP should stem from evidence of research-based practices in the classroom, as determined by system¬atic classroom observations by the principal and by peers. Professional development is a means for elevating the skill and knowledge of administrators, teachers, and staff, whenever the SIP calls for new expertise to enable the school to move in a new direction or to address a particular problem. Depending on the results of the observations, professional development can be geared to improving the teaching abilities across the faculty, or can include training and coaching to assist an individual teacher needing improvement (Redding, 2007).

Research-based teaching practices and their indicators provide the elements of a classroom observation instrument. The observer (the principal or another teacher) would meet with the teacher before the observation, to review the indicators, and after the observation, to discuss the observer's impressions. The two can then create or update the teacher's professional development plan, listing observed strengths and weaknesses, and steps toward improvement, with the observer helping the teacher carry out these next steps (Redding, 2007).

A major hurdle for the modern principal is finding the time to conduct classroom observations. DuFour and Mattos (2013) asked the basic question of whether principals have the time and expertise to enhance student learning through classroom observations. They considered the case of Tennessee, one of the first states to receive a Race to the Top grant. The Tennessee model calls for fully half of each teacher's evaluation to be based on principal observations (with the other half based on student growth (35%) and student achievement data (15%). Each new teacher is to be observed six times per year, and each licensed teacher four times per year, on one or more of four areas—instruction, professionalism, classroom environment, and planning—and these four areas are further subdivided into 116 subcategories. For each observation there is supposed to be a pre-conference and a post-conference, and principals must input data on each observation using the state rubric for assessing teachers. According to princi-

pals, the whole process takes four to six hours for each observation. DuFour and Mattos, both former principals, feel that these requirements, while well intentioned, fail to recognize the extraordinary demands on the modern principal. Synthesizing the research, Marzano, Waters, & McNulty (2004) have identified 21 different responsibilities that principals must address, in an environment where everything may suddenly need to be set aside due to crises over which the principal has little or no control. So realistic demands on the principal are vital.

A recent survey by Dunaway, Kim, and Szad (2012)—designed to determine how teachers and administrators in a successful North Carolina district perceived the purpose and value of their SIPs and the planning process—found that principals and teachers possessed very divergent perceptions regarding all phases of the SIP process. One area of the survey focused on the perception and importance of the role that school culture (as expressed in beliefs, values, vision, and mission) played in the SIP development process. While 74% of teachers and 90% of principals agreed that the beliefs and values of the school must be explored, developed, and agreed upon before any meaningful schoolwide improvement can take place, there was a large discrepancy between the two groups when asked whether the faculty as a whole revisits and agrees on school beliefs and values before the SIP is developed. According to Elmore (2000), it is impossible for a school to have the necessary unified set of values necessary as a precondition for school improvement when there is such a lack of fundamental agreement. Ninety percent of principals and 69% of teachers felt that an agreed-upon school vision and mission were critical to any meaningful SIP, and 60% of principals and 50% of teachers felt that the faculty as a whole revisited and agreed on the school's vision and mission before the SIP was developed (Dunaway, Kim, & Szad (2012).

Since nearly every state requires observing teachers in their classrooms as a vital element of determining teacher quality, the systems that yield these observations must have clear standards of practice, instruments and procedures through which teachers can demonstrate their skill, and observers who can make accurate and consistent judgments based on the evidence. Additionally, approaches to classroom observation can be designed that yield important lessons for teachers by incorporating practices associated with professional learning, such as self-assessment, reflection on practice, and professional conversation (Danielson, 2012).

References and Resources

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