| 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 offers frequent opportunities for staff and parents to voice constructive critique of the school's progress and suggestions for improvement. (5139)

Explanation: Constructive critique can come through formal channels, such as teacher representation on the school's Leadership Team and teacher and parent representation on a School Community Council. Open-air meetings to share goals, plans, and data can also be a forum for constructive input. The principal's one-on-one meetings with staff and parents is another opportunity. The important consideration is that the school operates with a "culture of candor" in which people are encouraged to voice their constructive observations and recommendations.

Questions: By what means does your principal solicit and encourage constructive critique of the school's progress and improvement process? Are goals, plans, and data shared so that people can respond with a good background of information? Are the evolving school improvement plan and its implementation tasks made available to stakeholders?

Research shows that learning-focused leaders stimulate staff collaboration by, among other things, establishing and using formal mechanisms for professional interchanges (e.g., staff meetings, professional development activities, common planning periods), and giving faculty a formal role in communication and decision making. On a less formal level, learning-focused leaders promote staff collaboration by discussing instructional issues regularly in informal ex-changes with teachers, by soliciting teachers' opinions, by showing respect and consideration for staff and their ideas, and by encouraging direct, informal communication among staff (Murphy, 2007).

Intellectual stimulation occurs when the principal challenges teachers to reexamine assumptions they have about their job role. When a principal focuses intellectual thought, knowledge, and insight toward building relationship between teachers and parents and teachers and students, these groups develop greater capacity to work together for the common good of the student, resulting in higher levels of trust among the teacher, parent, and student, with students generally accepting greater responsibility for their schooling (Mees, 2009).

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 school-wide 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).

Many highly successful schools have high levels of parental involvement and support. But while the federal No Child Left Behind Act (NCLB) requires thousands of schools receiving Title I aid to set aside a portion of that money for family-engagement activities, critics claim the law encourages a focus on compliance rather than fostering creative and sustained cooperation between schools and parents, while offering districts and schools too little guidance on how to engage parents in a meaningful way. Some even argue that principals, already saddled with No Child Left Behind's other mandates, particularly in testing, have little incentive to take parent engagement seriously. Even the U.S. Department of Education, in 2012, said that the approach to family engagement has been fragmented and nonstrategic, often constituting 'random acts of family involvement,' and that what is needed is "a comprehensive plan for bringing families to the table" (Cavanagh, 2012).

Some organizations are trying to help school leaders engage parents in creative and focused ways. In a widely referenced document, Epstein (1995) describes "six types of parental involvement" or ways that teachers, principals, parents, and others can engage families and communities in schools, using an array of strategies rather than relying on any single approach. The six types of involvement include: (1) parenting (helping families with child-rearing and parenting skills), (2) communicating (developing effective home-school communication), (3) volunteering (creating ways that families can become involved in activities at the school), (4) learning at home (supporting learning activities in the home that reinforce school curricula, (5) decision-making (including families as decision-makers through school-site councils, committees, etc.), and (6) collaborating with the community (matching community services with family needs and serving the community).

References and Resources

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