Core Function	District Context and Support for School Improvement	Effective Practice	Improving the school within the framework of district support

Indicator: The district sets district, school, and student subgroup achievement targets. (5627)

Explanation: Reaching a goal begins by setting one. As the districts and its schools engage in their improvement processes, elevating the quality of professional practice to achieve greater results in student learning, having reasonable annual targets enables them to measure their success. Standards-aligned benchmark tests provide points of reference within the year to gauge progress.

Questions: Does your district set annual achievement targets for the district, each school, and each student subgroup (district wide and within each school)? Who is involved in setting the targets? How is it determined that the targets find the right balance between reasonable expectation and high expectation? How are the targets communicated to district and school personnel?

Specific short- and long-term achievement targets for the district, for individual schools, and for subpopulations of students should be set in order to emphasize the earnestness of the goal of improvement. Short-term targets can provide ongoing gauges of progress while loftier goals (i.e., ensuring all student will graduate ready for college), offer a longer view of what the district is working toward. Learning-focused leadership works toward high achievement for all students. To this end, districts must aggressively communicate a consistent message of high expectations with no excuses. In order to validate such an elevated objective, a district may offer examples of high achievement success of neighboring schools with at-risk student populations as evidence that the goal of high achievement can be obtained (Wong, 2007; Cawelti & Protheroe, 2007) Cawelti and Protheroe (2007) emphasize the role of the superintendent in setting priorities, "The district's vision and goals should drive programmatic and financial decisions at all levels of the system. The superintendent is key to making this happen, and much of this leader's efforts must be on ensuring district goals translate into what happens in the daily life of schools and classrooms" (p.40).

The Sunnyside School District in Sunnyside, Washington, sets achievement targets which are accompanied by indicators of success and expected system outcomes. In 2009, the district set three targets to be achieved by spring 2012. In addition, there were four indicators of success and four outcomes established. Some examples include

- TARGET: In the spring of 2012, 90% of students, regardless of ethnicity, economic level, language, or special education meet standards.

- INDICATOR OF SUCCESS: Gaps between student performance in 2012 targets are reduced and progress reflects the necessary growth trajectory.

- OUTCOME: Support for System-wide improvement (Sunnyside School District, 2009).

Kowal, Hassel, & Hassel (2009) in a cross-sector study found that successful turnaround leaders choose "a few high priority goals with visible payoffs and use early success to gain momentum, motivate staff, and disempower nay-

sayer" (p. 4).

For English Language Learners

Districts must set high standards for all students with the expectation that ELLs will meet them. In addition to setting high standards, the district must also set goals for reaching state targets. States develop annual measurable achievement objectives (AMAOs) that relate to their "development and attainment of English proficiency while meeting challenging state academic content and student academic achievement standards."

For example, the Massachusetts Elementary and Secondary Department of Education has published Annual Measurable Achievement Objectives (AMAOs) for Limited English Proficiency students in the state: "The state target for 2011 is for sixty-one percent (61%) of LEP students to make progress toward acquiring English proficiency. Statewide, fifty-eight percent (58%) of LEP students made progress" (Massachusetts Department of Elementary and Secondary Education, 2011).

References and Resources

Cawelti, G., & Protheroe, N. (2007). The school board and central office in district improvement. In H. J. Walberg (Ed.), *Handbook on restructuring and substantial school improvement* (pp. 37–52). Charlotte, NC: Information Age.

Chappuis, S., Chappuis, J., & Stiggins R. (2009). The quest for quality. *Education Leadership, 67*(3), 14–19.

Guskey, T., & Bailey, J. (2009). *Developing standards-based report cards*. Thousand Oaks California: Corwin Press.

Hanes, S., Kerins, T., Perlman, C., Redding, S., & Ross, S. (2009). *Evaluating the statewide system of support with rubrics, explanations, and exemplars*. Lincoln, IL: Center on Innovation & Improvement. Retrieved from www.centerii.org/survey

Hassel, E. A., & Hassel, B. C. (2009). The big U-turn: How to bring schools from the brink of failure to stellar success. *Education Next, 9*(1), 21–27.

Hassel, E. A., & Hassel, B. C. (2009). *Try, try again: How to triple the number of fixed failing schools without getting any better at fixing schools*. Public Impact. Retrieved from http://www.publicimpact.com/try-try-again/

Kerins, T., & Perlman, C. (1999). *Assessment handbook—A guide for developing assessment programs in Illinois schools*. Springfield, Illinois: Illinois State Board of Education Press.

Kerins, T., Perlman, C., & Redding, S. (2008). *Coherence in the statewide system of support.* Lincoln, IL: Center on Innovation & Improvement. Retrieved from www.centerii.org/survey

Massachusetts Department of Elementary and Secondary Education. (2011). English language learners 2011 annual measurable achievement objectives (AMAO). Retrieved from http://www.doe.mass.edu/ell/amao/2011/

Public Impact. (2007). *School turnarounds: A review of the cross-sector evidence on dramatic organizational improvement*. Lincoln, IL: Center on Innovation & Improvement. Retrieved from http://www.centerii.org/survey/

Redding, S., & Walberg, H. J. (Eds.). (2008). *Handbook on state-wide systems of support*. Charlotte, NC: Information Age. Retrieved from www.centerii.org/survey

Sunnyside School District. (2009). *Sunnyside school district 2011-2012 student achievement targets*. Retrieved from http://www.sunnyside .wednet.edu/upload/uploads/district/districtimprovementplan.pdf

Wong, K. (2007). District-wide framework for improvement. In H. J. Walberg (Ed.), *Handbook on restructuring and substantial school improvement* (pp. 23–36). Charlotte, NC: Information Age.