Indicator: The school has established a team structure among teachers with specific duties and time for instructional planning. (5143)

Explanation: The evidence review indicates that incorporating team structures into the school culture assists in driving improvement at the school and informs district policies and practices. Team structures charged with specific functions and purpose can address three unique areas of need in schools; instruction and instructional methods, whole school improvement planning and family community connections. Teams, when effectively constructed and managed, shore up continuous improvement planning frameworks.

Questions: How will the school establish team structures with specific purpose and duties? How will the school ensure that time necessary for meetings is supplied and protected for teams? How will the school prepare teachers for their service on teams? What incentives will the school offer to attract teachers to serve on teams? How will the school articulate in its governance policies and procedures the purpose and expectations of teams? How will the school document the work of teams?

Evidence Review: Establishing Team Structures to Drive Improvement

Teams at both the district and school levels, when effectively purposed, organized, and supervised, provide an infrastructure for continuous improvement. District teams' decisions can be informed by input from the school teams.

Marzano (2003) points out the leadership should not reside with one individual; a team approach to planning and decision making allows for distributive leadership. While principals in effective schools promote staff collaboration, teachers working with less effective instructional leaders function more as individuals than as members of a school team – "in the less successful schools, teachers were often left completely alone to plan what to teach, with little guidance from their senior colleagues and little coordination with other teachers: (Rutter et al., 1979, p. 136). Collaborative activities that do occur in these less successful schools are more socially based and less professionally oriented than the exchanges that occur in schools with more effective instructional leaders.

Schmoker (1996) recommends that teams of teachers implement, assess, and adjust instruction in short-term cycles of improvement – not annually, but continuously. Common team tasks include intensive efforts to align content taught across grades, and development of interim and diagnostic mini-assessments to monitor student progress on a continuing basis. Practices such as the development of agendas and minutes and the use of organized procedures for meetings help the teams stay focused and maintain a history of team work.

Planning and decision making within the district and school require teams, time, and access to timely information. That is, decision-making groups must be organized and

given time to plan and monitor the parts of the system for which they are responsible. Hassell et al. (2006) provide useful tools to begin the change process and get planning teams started.

A basic structure for team planning, work, and decision making in a school includes a Leadership Team, Instructional Teams, and a team focused on the family-school connection (such as a School Community Council).

- The Leadership Team is typically comprised of the principal and team leaders from the Instructional Teams (grade level or subject area teams). The Leadership Team may also function as the School Improvement Team, with parent members attending meetings scheduled for purposes of reviewing and amending the school improvement plan.
- Instructional Teams are manageable groupings of teachers by grade level or subject area who meet to develop instructional strategies aligned to the standards-based curriculum and to monitor the progress of the students in the grade levels or subject area for which the team is responsible.
- A School Community Council is comprised of the principal, counselor, social work, teachers, and parents (typical configuration), with parents constituting the majority of the membership. The School Community Council advises, plans, and assists with matters related to the school-home compact, homework, open houses, parent-teacher conferences, school-home communication, and parent education (including training and information about learning standards and the parents' role in supporting children's learning at home).

Action Principles

For District

1. Address district and school team structures and expectations in official district policy.
2. Expect teams to sustain their operation even through changes in district and school leadership.
3. Provide adequate time for teams to meet, conduct business, and meet the expectations of district policy.
4. Require teams to prepare and maintain documentation of meeting agendas, minutes, and work products.
5. Provide professional development for district and school personnel on effective teaming practices.
6. Include successful engagement of teams and evidence of their productivity in evaluation of district and school administrators.
7. Systematize the regular reporting of the work of school and district teams of the school board.

For School

1. Incorporate team structures into the school improvement plan and school

governance policy.

2. Develop written statements of purpose and by-laws for each team's operation.
3. Provide teams with work plans for the year and specific work products to produce.
4. Insure that all teams prepare agendas for their meetings, maintain minutes, and catalog their work products.
5. Maintain a file of the agendas, work products, and minutes of the all teams.
6. Provide adequate time for teams to meet, conduct business, and meet the expectations of district and school policy. A rule of thumb is that Leadership Teams and School Community Councils meet twice each month for an hour each meeting; Instructional Teams meet twice each month for 45 minutes to conduct business and for blocks of time 4 to 6 hours each month to review student learning data and develop and refine instructional plans.
7. Insure that teams receive timely access to information, including student progress data and summaries of classroom observations.
8. Provide professional development on effective teaming practices.

(Perlman & Redding, 2011, pp. 65–66)

A typical Leadership Team is described in the Lamar County Primary School *Schoolwide/School Improvement Plan 2014-2015*, submitted to the Georgia Department of Education in 2014. Lamar County Primary School (LCPS) is the only primary school in the Lamar County School System, housing approximately 749 students in grades PreK through second. LCPS has a diverse population of students, with 420 White, 272 Black, 39 Multi-racial, 14 Hispanic, and 3 Asian. Approximately 75% of students participate in Free/Reduced Lunch.

"The Leadership Team (Better Seeking Team) meets once per month to discuss and develop the school improvement plan. Grade level chairs from each grade level are on the committee. The committee members serve in an advisory role to the principal making school wide decisions related to the school improvement process as a whole. This panel writes, reviews, and aligns the school improvement plan (SIP) to ensure each student's success. Each teacher has a common planning time assigned to a group of teachers from their grade level. During these planning meetings the teachers discuss the plan and provide feedback in a notebook that is brought to each planning committee meeting and discussed. Each grade level has a monthly grade level meeting where all of the grade level teachers meet together to discuss concerns or to share ideas. The Learning Support Specialist meets with each planning team weekly to share ideas and to provide additional support with STAR Renaissance Learning, and the Common Core Curriculum" (Lamar County Primary School, 2014).

Evidence Review: Decision-Making Indicators – Shared Leadership

Shared Leadership		Assessing the Current Situation		Adding the Missing Pieces	
The District		Yes	No	Primary Responsibility	Target Date for Completion
1. District policies and procedures support site-based decision-making.					
2. District and school decision-makers are connected by frequent interaction, two-way communication, problem solving, mutual coordination, and reciprocal influence.					
3. The district has provided he school with a "letter of understanding" about the school's continuous improvement system and the district's support for it.					
4. The district has assigned a contact person for the school to serve as a liaison between the central office and the school to advance the school's continuous improvement.					
Teams and Time					
1. A team structure is official incorporated into the school improvement plan and school governance policy.					
2. A Leadership Team including the principal and teacher leaders from each Instructional Team is in place					
3. The Leadership Team meets regularly (twice a month or more).					
4. The Leadership Team seeks the input of others not on the team, in order to represent all faculty/staff.					
5. The Leadership Team serves as a conduit of communication of the faculty and staff.					
6. The Leadership Team shares in decisions of real substance pertaining to curriculum, instruction, assessment, and professional development.					

7. The Leadership Team regularly looks at school performance data and uses that data to make decisions about school improvement needs.					
8. Teachers are organized into grade-level, grade-level, grade-level cluster, or subject-area Instructional Teams.					
9. Instructional Teams meet regularly (twice a month or more) to conduct business.					
10. Instructional Teams meet for blocks of time sufficient to develop and refine units of instruction and review student learning data.					
11. A School Community Council including the principal, teacher representative(s), counselor, parent liaison, and parents is in place.					
12. A majority of the members of the SCC are parents of currently enrolled students who are not also employees of the school.					
13. The SCC meets regularly (twice a month or more).					
14. The SCC is organized with a constitution and by-laws.					
15. All teams prepare agendas for their meetings.					
16. All teams maintain official minutes of their meetings.					
17. The principal maintains a file of the agendas, work products, and minutes of all teams.					
The Principal					
1. Principal makes sure everyone understands the school's mission, clear goals, and their roles in meeting the goals.					
2. Principal leads and participates actively with the Leadership Team.					
3. Principal participates actively with the SCC and shows support for its significance.					
4. Principal monitors the work of the Instructional Teams and helps to keep them focused on instructional improvement.					
5. Principal monitors curriculum and classroom instruction regularly.					

6. Principal poorly performing teachers to improve.					
7. Principal spends at least 50% of his/her time working directly with teachers to improve instruction.					

(Redding, 2006, pp. 54–57)

Idaho uses a tool called the Ways to Improve School Effectiveness (WISE) tool. In its *SY 2014–2015 Idaho Improvement Planning & Implementation Workbook*, the Idaho State Department of Education (2014) lists the WISE District Indicators. Under "Improving The School Within The Framework Of District Support," the indicators are:

IA01: The district includes municipal and civic leaders in district and school improvement planning and maintains regular communication with them.

IA02: The district includes community organizations in district and school improvement planning and maintains regular communication with them.

IA03: The district includes parent organizations in district and school improvement planning and maintains regular communication with them.

IA04: The district provides incentives for staff who work effectively in hard-to-staff and restructured schools.

IA05: The district contracts with external service providers for key services in restructured schools.

IA06: The district provides schools with technology, training, and support for integrated data collection, reporting, and analysis systems.

IA07: The district sets district, school, and student subgroup achievement targets.

IA08: The school board and superintendent present a unified vision for school improvement.

IA09: The superintendent and other central office staff are accountable for school improvement and student learning outcomes.

IA10: The district regularly reallocates resources to support school, staff, and instructional improvement.

IA11: The district ensures that key pieces of user-friendly data are available in a timely fashion at the district, school, and classroom levels.

IA12: The district intervenes early when a school is not making adequate progress.

IA13: The district works with the school to provide early and intensive intervention for students not making progress.

IA14: The district recruits, trains, supports, and places personnel to competently address the problems of schools in need of improvement.

IA15: The district utilizes a central database that includes each student's test scores, placement information, demographic information, attendance, behavior indicators, and other variables useful to teachers.

IA16: The district has a comprehensive plan that includes testing each student at least 3 times each year to determine progress toward standards-based objectives.

Under "Taking The Change Process Into Account," the indicators are:

IB01: The district operates with district-level and school-level improvement teams.

IB02: The district examines existing school improvement strategies being implemented across the district and determines their value, expanding, modifying, and culling as evidence suggests.

IB07: The district ensures that school improvement and restructuring plans include research-based, field-proven programs, practices, and models.

IB08: The district ensures that school improvement and restructuring plans include a clear vision of what the school will look like when restructured or substantially improved.

IB09: The district ensures that an empowered change agent (typically the principal) is appointed to head each restructuring school.

IB11: The district ensures that school improvement and restructuring plans include "quick wins," early successes in improvement.

IB12: The district is prepared for setbacks, resistance, and obstacles on the path to substantial improvement.

Under "Clarifying District-School Expectations," the indicators are:

IC01: The school reports and documents its progress monthly to the superintendent, and the superintendent reports the school's progress to the school board.

IC02: The district designates a central office contact person for the school, and that person maintains close communication with the school and an interest in its progress.

IC03: District and school decision makers meet at least twice a month to discuss the school's progress.

IC04: District policies and procedures clarify the scope of site-based decision making granted a school and are summarized in a letter of understanding.

IC05: The district provides a cohesive district curriculum guide aligned with state standards or otherwise places curricular expectation on the school.

IC06: The district provides the technology, training, and support to facilitate the school's data management needs.

IC07: Professional development is built into the school schedule by the district, but the school is allowed discretion in selecting training and consultation that fit the requirements of its improvement/restructuring plan and its evolving needs.

IC08: Staff development is built into the schedule for support staff (e.g., aides, clerks, custodians, cooks) as well as classroom teachers.

IC09: The student report card shows the student's progress in meeting learning standards.

Under "District Preparation for Turnaround Schools," the indicators are:

DTA01: For each school in the turnaround plan category, the district ensures that the chosen Turnaround Model option (e.g., transformation model, Restart, etc.) reflects the particular strengths and weaknesses of the school.

Turnaround Principle #1 – Provide strong leadership

DTA02: The LEA examines its policies and makes modifications as needed to provide operational flexibility for principals in order to support school turnaround plans in key areas (e.g., scheduling, staff, curriculum, and budget).

DTA03: The LEA reviews the capacity of principals in schools required to implement turnaround plans and determines whether an existing principal has the necessary competencies to lead the turnaround effort (e.g., based on his/her track record or leadership capacity) or whether the principal needs to be replaced with a stronger, more effective leader.

DTA04: The LEA ensures that a school leadership team made up of the principal and diverse staff representatives is in place and meets regularly to make decisions of substance in schools required to implement turnaround plans.

Turnaround Principle #2 – Ensure teachers are effective and able to improve instruction

DTA05: For schools required to implement turnaround plans, the LEA aligns professional development with identified needs as based upon staff evaluation results, student performance, and other pertinent sources of data.

DTA06: The LEA reviews the quality of all staff members in schools required to implement turnaround plans and retains only those who have the ability to support the turnaround plan.

DTA07: The LEA has policies and practices in place that prevent ineffective teachers from transferring to schools that are required to implement turnaround plans.

Turnaround Principle #3 – Redesign the school day, week, year

DTA08: The LEA allocates resources (e.g., financial and human capital) to support extended learning time in schools required to submit turnaround plans.

(Idaho State Department of Education. 2014, pp. 11–12)

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