

01. DISTRICT BOARD

A. DISTRICT PURPOSE. The district board has developed a widely shared purpose statement (e.g., mission, vision, shared values) and goals focused on ensuring high levels of learning for all students.

i. The district board, with input from key stakeholders, has developed a shared purpose statement focused on ensuring high levels of learning for all students.

Establishing a broadly shared purpose is common practice for strong districts (Leithwood & McCullough, 2016). The district purpose should focus on ensuring high levels of learning (grade level or higher) for all students (DuFour, DuFour, Eaker, Many, & Mattos, 2016). The purpose may consist of vision, mission, beliefs, and goals.

ii. The district board has developed a few key goals that are appropriate for where the district is at in the improvement journey.

A McKinsey & Company study titled *How the World's Most Improved School Systems Keep Getting Better* showed that, regardless of the local context, improving school systems have adopted similar interventions that are appropriate to their stage of the improvement journey (Mourshed, Chijioke, & Barber, 2010). The graphics on pages 27 and 28 provide an overview. These intervention clusters provide a starting point for district goals and strategic planning.

iii. The district board has created a strategic plan with goals, key strategies, aligned resources, and a monitoring process.

A system is “an organization characterized by a set of interactions among the people who work there, the tools and materials they have at their disposal, and the processes through which these people and resources join together to accomplish its work” (Carnegie, 2018). The strategic challenge for districts and the State of Wyoming is implementing a coherent system that meets the requirements of statute and achieves the intended results (i.e. the purpose and goals). The planning documents and methods vary depending on the district.

B. GOVERNANCE AND OVERSIGHT. The district board and superintendent work as a team to create the system (i.e. Structures, Relationships and Processes) necessary to achieve the district purpose and goals.

i. The board maintains updated, publicly available policies and documents, and governs the district in accordance with law and board policy.

Outstanding boards develop policies, use policy governance, strategically plan, and monitor district progress. They understand systems and processes, with the expectation of outstanding results, but do not manage the daily operations of the district (Wallace Foundation, n.d.). The Wyoming School Boards Association (WSBA) promotes an online program for managing board documents and provides guidance related to policy governance.

ii. The district board is trained in their specific duties, conduct of meetings, and district operations.

The WSBA provides training for board member to learn the duties and responsibilities of a district board. The board-superintendent team work together to develop and improve policies and governance procedures (Balch & Adamson, 2018).

iii. The district board regularly self-evaluates, and evaluates the superintendent based on performance of his or her defined duties.

Research supports superintendent hiring procedures “that rely less on inflated expectations and more on hiring top managers who support practices proven to cultivate student success” (States, 2018).

The WSBA provides an instrument for board self-evaluation. Some boards evaluate the superintendent throughout the year based on achievement of specific duties and others evaluate the superintendent annually. Superintendents are evaluated using a leader evaluation model that meets Chapter 29 Rules.

02. DISTRICT LEADERSHIP

A. ORGANIZATIONAL LEADERSHIP. District leaders (central office and school administrators) maintain the system necessary to enact the district vision for learning and achieve the district purpose and goals.

i. The accreditation sections, or similar categories, are used to describe the district system and to align district processes.

Evidence-based describes interventions (e.g. policies, practices, and programs) based of what has been proven by research to work best to achieve positive educational outcomes, rather than basing decisions on opinion. (States, 2018). This framework consists primarily of evidence-based practices aligned to and inclusive of Wyoming statute. It can be used to organize district and school processes, and can be used to describe the Wyoming education system in varying levels of specificity.

ii. District instructional priorities are defined in an instructional framework and shared with instructional staff across the district.

The district should provide guidance related to curriculum, assessment and instruction, and should establish the expectation that schools and teachers intervene quickly to address the needs of individual students (Leithwood & McCullough, 2016).

iii. All leaders in the district are provided support to implement the district system, and are evaluated in accordance with state regulations.

“Improving the systems thinking capacity of district leaders is a function of improving both individual and collective capacity” (Leithwood, 2013). The district should have a sustained approach to building the individual and collective capacity of all district leaders, including central office administrators and school leaders (Marzano & Waters, 2009). This includes the ongoing collection and use of data. Using data to inform decisions is common across strong districts (Leithwood & McCullough, 2016). This also includes leader evaluation, consistent with Chapter 29 Rules.

B. QUALITY IMPROVEMENT. All district personnel frequently use the principles of continuous improvement to analyze processes and make the changes necessary to decrease the variability of results.

i. The district has a clearly defined theory of action for improvement (e.g., Internal Coherence Framework) that is shared with and by all district personnel.

Dr. Richard Elmore, from the Harvard Graduate School of Education, promotes the use of a conceptual model for improvement called the internal coherence framework which demonstrates the relationship between leadership, process improvement, collective efficacy, and student achievement (Forman, Elizabeth, & Bocala, 2017).

ii. All district personnel and teams use the same process and quality tools (e.g., PDSA, flow charts) for continuous improvement.

According to the Carnegie Foundation, not all evidence-based interventions work equally well in all settings. "Variation in performance is the key problem to address. The critical issue is not what works, but rather what works, for whom and under what set of conditions." Defining the current process is necessary before the process can be improved. Root cause analysis tools like Five Whys and the Fishbone Diagram are used to understand the problem with the current process. The Plan-Do-Study-Act cycle is used to improve existing processes (Carnegie, 2018).

iii. District leaders and staff routinely address specific problems through networked improvement communities.

Networked improvement communities (NICs) bring users together to address a specific problem (e.g. chronic absenteeism, improving language skills of English Learners, strengthening family engagement) or to improve a particular process. Anthony Bryk, President of the Carnegie Foundation for the Advancement of Teaching, advocates for a shift from a focus on implementing programs to a focus on problem solving that includes the voices of all involved (Bryk A. S., 2017).

03. SCHOOL LEADERSHIP

A. PRINCIPAL LEADERSHIP. Principals are efficient, effective leaders who share leadership responsibilities and maintain the conditions necessary to ensure the success of all students.

i. School leaders cultivate a collaborative culture with shared goals, shared leadership roles, and leadership development among staff and students.

Research indicates that leading teacher learning and development; establishing goals and expectations; ensuring quality teaching; resourcing strategically (allocating staff, time, and instructional materials); and, ensuring an orderly and safe environment, are the principal competencies with the greatest impact on student achievement. The principal job is more than one person can handle in many schools. Often leadership roles are distributed across the staff (States, 2018).

ii. School leader evaluation is aligned to accreditation, and school accreditation is monitored through the school leader evaluation process.

Districts are responsible for ensuring that all schools governed by the district meet all applicable accreditation requirements. Districts can reduce the redundancy between school leader evaluation and school accreditation by aligning the applicable accreditation requirements to the leader evaluation model and accomplishing both through the same process.

iii. School leaders maintain open communications with staff, including regular staff meetings, informal conversations, and an open-door policy.

“Successful principals encourage open communication in many ways, including through regular staff meetings, newsletters, open committees, and teacher surveys. Staff from improving schools emphasized the importance of school leaders encouraging an open-door policy and having the opportunity to influence schoolwide decision making, whereas staff from struggling schools often described communication strategies as limited or ineffective” (AIR, 2016).

B. LEARNING LEADERSHIP: Principals act as leaders of learning and agents of change who positively contribute to their own school and the district improvement efforts.

i. Principals act in the capacity of lead learner by routinely promoting and participating in professional development with teachers.

“Of a principal’s competencies, the role of leading and participating in teacher learning and development has been shown to have the greatest impact on student outcomes... Principal participation reinforces commitment to the process, gives principals greater expertise in teaching strategies, and increases understanding of the challenges facing teachers” (States, 2018).

ii. Time is built into the schedule for professional collaboration and principals lead collaborative work that improves quality throughout the faculty.

John Hattie suggests the emphasis should be on development of collaborative expertise (Hattie, 2015). Michael Fullan warns against being overly focused on individual teachers. He states “in dealing with their staffs, principals should shift from focusing on one-to-one work with each individual teacher to leading collaborative work that improves quality throughout the faculty” (Fullan, 2014).

iii. Principals monitor and evaluate instruction in accordance with the district instructional framework and state regulations.

Teacher evaluation and other instructional observation approaches are used to monitor implementation of practices defined in the district instructional framework. Dr. Richard Elmore promotes a focus on the instructional core – the relationship between what students are doing in the classroom, the instructional methods, and the content being taught (City, 2009). See 11.A.i. for instructional methods highly correlated to student achievement. Research is supportive of instructional coaching rather than high stakes evaluation (Kraft, Blazar & Hogan, 2018). The evaluation process must meet the requirements of Wyoming statute and Chapter 29 rules.

04. STAKEHOLDER COMMUNICATIONS AND INPUT

A. STAKEHOLDER COMMUNICATIONS. District leaders and staff routinely provide information to district, school and community stakeholders.

i. The district and all schools follow a communications plan that includes specific branding guidelines.

Specific communication or public relations plans, branding guidelines, and marketing strategies are commonly used by districts when providing information to stakeholders and marketing themselves through a wide range of communications channels (NSPRA, n.d.).

ii. The district maintains an attractive, accessible, functional website and uses social media to direct traffic to the website.

Some marketing experts recommend making the web page a single information source and using social media and blogs to increase website traffic. A Google Chrome add-on named WAVE can be used to check ADA accessibility. Methods for checking and correcting document accessibility issues are built into Microsoft Office and Adobe Acrobat Professional.

iii. District leaders routinely provide information to stakeholders through a forum about current issues which is open to all stakeholders (e.g., radio, blog).

Some districts use blogs, radio appearances, podcasts, television, an annual state of the district address, etc. to provide information to stakeholders. The annual district report referenced in 07.B.iii is another example.

B. STAKEHOLDER INPUT. District and school leaders ask stakeholders to provide input to improve the district and school system.

i. Representatives of appropriate stakeholder groups provide input into major district and school decisions through surveys and focus groups.

Depending on the information being sought, districts obtain input from stakeholders using several methods. Surveys are effective if the goal is quantitative data. Focus groups (e.g., committees, community meetings) are productive if the goal is qualitative. The National School Public Relations association provides research and resources related to how to most effectively elicit public opinion (NSPRA, n.d.).

ii. The district and schools have adopted a comprehensive approach to family and community organization involvement and partnerships.

A comprehensive approach is defined in Epstein's framework for engagement. This includes involvement through parenting, communicating, volunteering, learning at home, decision-making, and collaborating with the community (Epstein, 2002, p. 14). Engagement of individual families in the provision of specific learning support is included in 12.A.iii.

iii. Leaders and staff develop relational trust with stakeholders and build social capital in the community.

Positive relationships between adults are critical to improvement and trust is at the heart of those relationships. Clear communications and coherent expectations are central to building relational trust (Bryk & Schneider, 2003). Social capital refers to the level of trust, mutual expectations, and shared values necessary to undertake positive improvements. As used here, social capital refers to the ability of leaders and staff to form relationships with individuals, families and organizations in the community to benefit students (FAST, n.d.).

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