



Indicator Explanation



DOMAIN	EFFECTIVE PRACTICE	INDICATOR
Leadership	Prioritize improvement and communicate its urgency	1A.1 School leaders set a clear direction for the school with a stated mission, baseline and performance targets, and evidence-based practices for sustained improvement.

Explanation: Members of the school's Leadership Team annually review student learning data and develop goals for the school year. Teams should review overall school/grade data, as well as data disaggregated for each student sub-group, and set goals that are measurable, clearly stated, and rigorous but attainable within the upcoming year. Teams should avoid setting too many learning goals and focus on between two to five areas of need; where possible, these goals should be tied to district goals to avoid stakeholder fatigue with too many new goals and initiatives. Yearly learning goals should strike a balance between aiming for increasing the percentages of students achieving established proficiency levels and increasing the amount of growth students are able to make within the school year.

Questions: Does your Leadership Team exam student learning data for the school annually and set goals for the school year? Do all team members have the capacity to engage in data-based decision making to help with their work on the team? Are data disaggregated to identify patterns of performance for various student subgroups? Are goals set to address this disaggregated performance data? Are yearly learning goals well articulated, focused, rigorous, measurable, and connected to district goals/initiatives? Has the Leadership Team identified two to five priority areas for establishing annual learning goals? Do the goals reflect a balance between proficiency and student growth?

Research has consistently demonstrated that a collaborative school culture, with educators working together in teams, is linked to higher levels of student achievement (DuFour, 2011; Hitt & Tucker, 2016). Research shows that when principals work with a team of teachers, forming school-based leadership teams, the speed at which improvement efforts occur is increased, and reform is more likely to be sustained (Edwards & Gammell, 2016; Pedersen, Yager, & Yager, 2010). Further, school leadership models are more effective when they distribute responsibilities to a team, rather than promoting unilateral decisions and actions (Hanover Research, 2013; Heck & Hallinger, 2010; The Wallace Foundation, 2013). Such a distributed system allows individuals to contribute to their areas of particular strength or interest (Institute for Educational Leadership, 2001). The school's Leadership Team is charged with developing and implementing the school's improvement plan, which includes setting annual learning goals focused on improving student learning.

How can the Leadership Team effectively use student learning data to set yearly learning goals for the school? Leadership teams set the course for school improvement by taking responsibility for activating the school improvement plan and coordinating faculty efforts to reach its goals (Munger & von Frank, 2010; von Frank, 2011). These responsibilities include developing a vision, setting goals, designing strategies, and monitoring the improvement process (Edwards & Gammell, 2016). Goals provide a common purpose and clarity within the dynamic and complex school environment, and are critical to setting the course for school improvement



(Latham & Locke, 2006). Involving teachers and other staff on the leadership team as active participants within the school improvement goal setting process both strengthens the design of the plan and results in increased buy-in and support from colleagues (Sebring, Allensworth, Bryk, Easton, & Luppescu, 2006).

The leadership team is positioned to take a broad view of the data available to them and make decisions on the focus and direction of school improvement efforts, thus establishing a data-driven decision-making culture (Kelley, 2010). They can assess annual student learning data and, in cooperation with the principal and other school leaders, establish annual learning goals for the school. Leadership teams should consider student learning data in the form of test scores that are disaggregated for various groups, including by income level (higher income versus lower income), ethnicity, and student learning needs (e.g., English Language Learners) (Kelly, 2010). Research shows that schools with strong learning gains ensure that annual goals reflect high expectations for all groups of students, and that staff hold each other accountable for the success of all children in the school, not just those in their classroom (Allensworth & Hart, 2018).

Learning Point Associates (2004) suggest that school leadership teams initially discuss the long-range desired outcomes for their students (e.g., five years from now), and then project one year toward that goal to develop annual learning goals. Teams should consider staff and student capacities and barriers, along with the levels of commitment (e.g., time, finances, etc.) necessary to achieve the goal. Well-written goals are:

- Clearly stated and focused;
- Based on the observed patterns seen in the data and their connection to district goals;
- Few in number, with the primary purpose of increasing student achievement;
- Measurable, and articulate the targeted outcome and not specific strategies;
- Sustainable, leading to system transformations that can be sustained into the future;
- Community-driven, and meet the needs of the school's surrounding community;
- Developed through consensus, with all team members in agreement; and,
- Attainable and realistic, resulting in stretching of efforts. (Learning Point Associates, 2004)

Effective goals within school settings have also been characterized as “SMART” goals (Specific, Measurable, Achievable, Results-oriented, and Timely). Teams are encouraged to reflect on their current reality and set SMART goals, as offered in the following middle school example (NJ DOE, 2015):

Our current reality: Last year, 30% of our students failed one or more semesters of math, and 45% of our students were unable to meet the state proficiency standard in math as assessed on the state assessment in May.

Our SMART goal: This year we will reduce the percentage of students failing math to less than 10% per semester and the percentage of students unable to meet state standards to no more than 20% of the overall student body.

School leaders need the capacity to engage effectively in data-based decision making in order to identify the most important goals for improving student learning; in many cases principals are trained in data analysis and may in turn provide training to the leadership team charged with facilitating school improvement (Southern Regional Education Board, 2010). Leadership teams should most often target two to five priority areas; selecting priority areas based on current and planned district and school initiatives can prevent stakeholders from being overwhelmed by too many new approaches (Hanover Research, 2014).

Goals, or learning targets, can be set in the form of proficiency (e.g., the minimum level of achievement students are expected to meet on summative assessments: All students will score at least a 75 on the end-of-course assessment) or growth targets (e.g., customized for each student based on pre-assessments or baseline data: All students will increase their pre-assessment scores by 30 points on the post-assessment) (Lachlan-Haché & Castro, 2015). Both types of learning targets have benefits and weaknesses (see Lachlan-Haché & Castro, 2015, for further discussion), and leadership teams are recommended to consider both types of targets/goals and “strike a balance” between the two for school improvement planning. Both data are likely readily available to elementary and middle schools as a result of the Every Student Succeeds Act mandates for districts (ESSA) (Jimenez & Sargrad, 2017).



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