



Indicator Explanation



DOMAIN	EFFECTIVE PRACTICE	INDICATOR
Leadership	Prioritize improvement and communicate its urgency	1A.6 Teachers are organized into grade-level, grade-level cluster, or subject area instructional teams.

Explanation: Strong classroom instruction begins with solid instructional planning, and that planning is most efficiently and effectively accomplished by teacher Instructional Teams. The composition of the teams, and the number of teams, will depend upon the size and nature of the school.

Questions: Are your teachers organized into Instructional Teams (by whatever name) so that they can develop and review formative assessments and plan units of instruction with differentiated lessons?

Valerie Stuart is a recent graduate from college with her degree in elementary education. She loved student teaching and is excited about stepping into her own classroom for the first time. She spent the last week getting her room prepared and going over her lesson plans. On a warm day in late August, she waits by her door for all her new third grade students to come pouring in. She's been imagining this day for months.

The students all file in and take their seats. Valerie starts in on her first lesson—mathematics. As she begins her instruction, a few of the boys near the back of the room are talking. Valerie isn't sure how to handle them. She doesn't want to get off on the wrong foot with her students—she wants everyone to like her. She tells the boys repeatedly to be quiet and pay attention, but it seems to just draw more attention to them and away from her lesson. She tries to talk a little louder, but soon realizes that the class is paying more attention to the boys than to her. She scolds the boys, but is now flustered and has lost her concentration on the lesson she prepared.

The rest of the day does not go much better. She quickly realizes that she has rushed through all the material she has prepared and there is too much time left in the school day. The class is unruly because she does not have enough to keep their attention. She shuts her door to make sure no one else sees how the class is behaving or how she is handling it. She feels underprepared and frustrated with the class's behavior. At the end of the day, she is relieved to see the last of the students go. She decides tonight, she will just have to prepare twice as much material to cover, but she has no idea how to keep her class in line.

How would Valerie's day have been different if, as a new teacher, she had been plugged into an instructional team made up of the veteran teachers in her building that could have shared lesson plans and classroom management tips with her? How often do classroom doors get closed in the hopes that no one sees what goes on or does not go on? Parret and Budge (2012) write, "We used to close our doors and rarely did we collaborate. We really didn't know what the other teachers were doing. Like somebody once said, we were independent operators united only by a common parking lot" (p. 143).



Hattie, in his book *Visible Learning for Teachers* (2012), says, “Within a school, we need to collaborate to build a team working together to solve the dilemmas in learning, to collectively share and critique the nature and quality of evidence that shows our impact on student learning, and to cooperate in planning and critiquing lessons, learning intentions, and success criteria on a regular basis” (p. 172). Teams of teachers, either grade-level, grade-level clusters, or subject—which ever fits your school—meet together to plan instruction, review assessments, discuss their students, and together create ways to improve instruction for all their students. Tasks shared by many become much more manageable. “Planning can be done in many ways, the most powerful is when teachers work together to develop plans, develop common understandings of what is worth teaching, collaborate on understanding their beliefs of challenge and progress, and work together to evaluate the impact of their planning on student outcomes” (Hattie, 2012, p. 41).

Redding (2006) believes that those who are closest to the student should make the decisions that affect students,

Some decisions are best made by the teachers responsible for particular groups of students—grade level teams or subject area teams, which we will call ‘instructional teams.’ 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. (p. 46)

This sentiment is echoed by Supovitz in his 2002 study which cited that “district policy makers sought to take advantage of teachers’ collective experience and familiarity with their students and focus teachers on the task of instructional improvement. Team-based schooling, they reasoned, would improve the culture of schooling, enhance the instructional practice of groups of teachers, and bring about higher levels of student learning” (p. 1591).

Lummis (2001) gives both some benefits of working in teams. The benefits include:

- Teachings working together are better able to create shared expectations and high standards for all students.
- Teachers working together engage in discourse that leads to creating learning experiences that are richer and of higher quality than those created by teachers working in isolation.
- Teachers working in teams are more effective in creating the collaborative culture that allows a school to continuously reflect on and improve its practices. (p. 6)

References

- Hattie, J. (2012). *Visible learning for teachers. Maximizing impact on learning*. Routledge.
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- Redding, S. (2006). *The mega system. Deciding. Learning. Connecting*. A handbook for continuous improvement within a community of the school. Academic Development Institute. <http://www.adi.org/mega/>
- Supovitz, J. A. (2002). Developing communities of instructional practice. *Teachers College Record*, 104(8), 1591–1626.