Indicator Explanation

DOMAIN	EFFECTIVE PRACTICE	INDICATOR
Talent	Recruit, develop, retain, and sustain talent	2A.1 The school attracts and retains qualified personnel who support the school's mission, vision, and purpose.

Recruiting and Hiring. Historically, recruiting candidates to be hired in schools has been left to the district; however, with the onset of accountability policies (e.g., NCLB) and the increasing specialization of academic programs, much of this responsibility has shifted to principals and other school leaders (Engel et al., 2018; Liu & Johnson, 2006). Recruiting effective candidates to teach in low-performing, high-needs schools often poses a daunting challenge for school and district leaders (Fusarelli et al., 2018). Schools with access to a local "pool" of qualified candidates to tap into can enhance the chances that qualified educators are available to step in to fill staff roles as needed (Johnson, 2019). School partnerships with local teaching preparation programs to form pipelines or "farm teams" of candidates have been shown to be effective strategies (Johnson, 2019; Simon et al., 2019). In addition, Research also suggests that recruiting and hiring teachers who are a good fit or match to schools is highly important (DeArmond et al., 2012; Jacob et al., 2018; Liu & Johnson, 2006), and "information-rich" hiring practices can enhance this quality of fit (Johnson, 2019). In several studies of low-income urban schools with successful student performance, the following best practices were used: 1) making fit a priority by ensuring candidates expressed endorsement and support for the school's mission, practices, and professional norms; 2) investing significant resources in recruiting and hiring, including careful screening of candidates through practices such as organized candidate visits to schools, interviews with current teachers, and required candidate teaching demonstrations (Johnson, 2019; Simon et al., 2019).

Grow Your Own (GYO) programs have also been proposed as a potential recruitment solution to systemic teacher shortages, and in some cases to increase teacher diversity for urban and isolated rural schools. GYO programs capitalize on the fact that many young teachers have a strong preference to teach close to home and establish career pathways or pipe-lines for candidates who are committed specifically to teach in these environments (Boyd et al., 2005; Reininger, 2012). GYO programs may be implemented at the high school level through cadet programs and teaching academies (Sutcher et al., 2016). For example, the North Carolina Teacher Cadet program offers a structured course of study in partnership with school districts to encourage high school students to consider the teaching profession through 21st century curriculum and hands-on teaching field experience (North Carolina Foundation for Public School Children, n.d.). The Teacher Cadet program is being offered in some form in at least 33 states (Toshalis, 2014). GYO programs also recruit and support community members, paraprofessionals, and teachers' aides in earning a teaching credential (Sutcher et al., 2016). Some research has demonstrated high rates of retention for teachers participating in various types of programs despite persistent structural barriers (Gist, Bianco, & Lynn, 2018), including paraprofessional (Abramovitz & D'Amico, 2011; Clewell & Villegas, 2001), and teacher assistant pipeline programs (Fortner et al., 2015).

Staff Evaluation. Even the best teachers must continuously improve their skills in order to meet the changing needs and expectations of students (Johnson, 2019). Research suggests that even veteran teachers with more than 10 years of experience generally continue to improve, particularly when they operate within supportive work environments (Goodwin & Slotnik, 2019; Papay & Kraft, 2015). Teacher evaluation systems that measure teaching quality have received a great deal of attention by educational policymakers and researchers in recent years. Research generally suggests that these systems, which often include structured observations, student performance data, and high-quality teacher feedback, have the potential to enhance teaching quality and student achievement (Dee & Wyckoff, 2015; Steinberg & Sartain, 2015; Taylor & Tyler, 2012). The types of student outcomes used to measure teachers' impact on learning vary significantly across schools and districts, and may include value-added academic achievement data (the extent to which instruction results in academic growth for students each year), achievement of student learning objectives (SLOs) set by the district, school, or teacher, and teacher-developed item banks and assessment measures (Lachlan-Haché, 2015). The best way to include student outcomes within these evaluation systems is hotly debated (Alexander & Jang, 2020; Darling Hammond, 2015); however, principals or other evaluator observations of instruction are at least of equal value within these systems.

Evaluation systems should be designed to help teachers improve their practice as well as for accountability purposes (Goodwin & Slotnik, 2019; Johnson, 2019). However, school leaders often lack training and expertise in how to use evaluation results to guide teachers towards professional growth (Goe et al., 2012; Grissom et al., 2021), as well as the time and expertise to implement evaluation systems effectively (Johnson, 2019). Goe and colleagues recommend several components be included in an aligned teacher or staff evaluation/professional growth system:

1. High-quality standards for instruction: Instructional standards should provide a picture of what effective teaching looks like. These standards (e.g., InTASC standards, Council of Chief State School Officers, 2011) should establish a foundation for professional growth plans and provide the basis for shared expectations and a common language, giving consistency to teacher coaching and mentoring. These standards also should offer a diagnostic approach to determining why students are not learning within a particular area, and provide criteria to help evaluators (principals, mentors, consulting teachers, etc.) determine areas where teachers are successful and/or need improvement. Standards should be transparent to teachers and ideally introduced within teacher preparation programs.
2. Multiple standards-based measures of teacher effectiveness: Common measures that can contribute to an aligned system that supports teaching and learning include classroom observations, student learning growth and performance, portfolios, student surveys, and classroom artifacts, or work samples. None of these measures should be used in isolation; multiple measures provide a more complete and accurate portrayal of areas of teacher strength and weakness (Donaldson & Papay, 2015; Steinberg & Donaldson, 2016). Any measures selected should directly and explicitly align with teaching standards, include protocols and processes that make sense to teachers, allow teachers to participate in or co-construct the evaluation, allow ample opportunity to discuss results with other colleagues, and align with professional development opportunities.
3. High-quality training on standards, tools, and measures: Observers and evaluators must receive ongoing training to effectively implement measures of teacher effectiveness. Getting teachers to "buy-in" to teacher evaluation systems that improve practice is essential, and ideally teachers are involved at every level of the design process. Minimally all teachers must receive high-quality training on standards and measures in order for them to take ownership of their own professional practice.
4. Training and supports to interpret results and make professional development recommendations: Principals and other evaluators will need training in using evidence and results to work with teachers to improve their performance. Administrators should be provided with professional development in how to provide the kind of feedback that teachers need and deserve in order to improve their teaching. Research suggests that this type of feedback is often lacking, and principals often need significant assistance to collect observational data and make it actionable to improve instruction (Drago-Severson & Blum-DeStefano, 2018; Grissom et al., 2017). They will also likely need guidance to maximize observer reliability and validity; for example, consideration of the scheduling of standardized observations is important, with teaching quality systematically changing over the school year due to testing influences, holidays, and growing familiarity and comfort between teachers and students (Casablanca et al., 2015).

Reorganizing principal roles may be necessary to free up adequate time for observations, and tapping into the expertise of other teacher leaders and peers to conduct observations can support teacher development within a cycle of continuous improvement (Johnson, 2019).

Human Capital Decisions: Rewarding and Replacing Staff. The inability to adequately reward excellent teachers can contribute to an inequitable distribution of high-quality teachers among schools within districts, as teachers with more seniority transfer out of less desirable placements and are replaced by less experienced and often less effective teachers (Podersky & Springer, 2011). Many educational researchers and policymakers are advocating for reforms to the compensation teachers receive, particularly in hard-to-staff schools (Aragon, 2016; Dee & Goldhaber, 2017; Sutcher et. al., 2016). For example, differentiated pay plans in both Florida and Tennessee allow for additional compensation for teachers working in low-performing schools (Reform Support Network, 2014). The Florida Critical Teacher Shortage program provided student loan forgiveness to certified teachers in designated shortage areas, compensated those seeking certification in these areas with paid tuition, and gave single year bonuses to those already certified and teaching in shortage areas (Feng & Sass, 2015). Both the loan forgiveness and bonus components resulted in decreased teacher attrition in shortage areas, although the impact varied by subject area (Feng & Sass, 2015).

Some studies have also shown that providing bonuses to teachers already teaching in high-poverty or low-achieving schools can lead to reductions in teacher attrition (Clotfelter et al., 2008; Springer et al., 2016; Swain et al., 2018). A study in the state of Washington also found similar effects for a program that paid teachers holding a National Board for Professional Teaching Standards (NBPTS) certification a $5,000 supplement for teaching in a high-poverty school, in addition to the same supplement teachers regularly received for simply attaining the credential (Cowan & Goldhaber, 2016). Follow-up analyses also showed that the policy increased certification rates and improved hiring processes by enhancing the composition of these schools' applicant pool, but failed to lead to improvements in student achievement (Cowan & Goldhaber, 2018).

The evidence that offering pay for performance structures positively impacts teachers and students is mixed at best. The theory behind the strategy is that these incentive programs may motivate teachers to use more innovative instructional practices (resulting in higher student achievement), and experience more positive working conditions because of strategies such as increased teamwork to reach goals for better pay (Yuan et al., 2013). In their study on teacher motivation and reported practices as a response to three different pay-for-performance programs, Yuan and colleagues found that these programs failed to increase teacher motivation or change instructional practices. A series of studies on New York City's Schoolwide Performance Bonus Program in high needs schools found no significant differences or even negative impacts of the program on student achievement (Fryer, 2011; Goodman & Turner, 2010; Marsh et al., 2011)Similarly, a bonus program in which middle school teams of teachers were to be rewarded based on their collective contributions to student achievement, resulted in no significant student achievement effects or changes to teacher practices and attitudes (Springer et al., 2012). These researchers suggested developing and testing alternative incentive models which reward teachers based on instructional practices and job responsibilities rather than student outcomes.

In an overview of research, Aragon (2016) concluded that pay-for-performance and other financial incentive programs should be coupled with improvements to teacher working conditions, and "implemented as part of a broader, holistic retention strategy, rather than as standalone initiatives" (p. 4). Positive working conditions include job-embedded professional learning, collaborative teacher groups (e.g., PLCs), and leadership and advancement opportunities. For example, Washington, D.C.'s performance pay system provides teacher supports in high-needs schools, including formal observations, personalized instructional coaching, and online instructional guidance and resources. This program has been shown to effectively exit low-performing teachers while recruiting and retaining high-performers, and improve student achievement (Adnot et al., 2017).

Late-career financial incentives are also recommended by some researchers, as the teaching profession has a greater percentage of early retirees than other professions (Dee & Goldhaber, 2017; Harris & Adams, 2007). Some research has suggested that targeted retention bonuses for highly effective senior teachers or those teaching in STEM fields may add anywhere from three to eight years to their careers, and may be a useful tool to raising teacher workforce quality and closing achievement gaps if bonuses are targeted to high-poverty schools (Kim et al., 2016). In addition, neutralizing "push" incentives that encourage early retirement through these retention bonuses that are selectively targeted to the most effective teachers may offer a cost-effective way to achieve intended outcomes (Kim et al., 2017). Career ladder structures that offer teacher leaders a chance to advance in their careers by taking on additional instructional responsibilities (e.g., peer reviewers, instructional coaches, department heads), may offer incentives, both financial and professional, at attract and retain highly-effective educators. According to Johnson (2019), "when [career ladders] are carefully planned and implemented, [they] can succeed in serving the interests of both the individual teacher and the school organization" (p. 139).

Competitive and equitable salaries for teachers serving high-needs students, as well as other incentives such as housing and child-care supports and forgivable loans and service scholarships can serve to attract and retain teachers in high-need fields and locations (Sutcher et al., 2016). Researchers are in agreement that it is important that districts provide targeted financial incentives for teachers with demonstrated positive impacts on student achievement to remain in hard-to-staff schools in order to ensure that these incentive programs are cost-effective (Dee & Goldhaber, 2017; Sutcher, et al., 2016).

Connecting the Research to Practice

Assessing your school's needs is a critical first step in identifying evidence-based practices appropriate for your school and planning for improvement. The suggested needs assessment questions below encompass three areas: data review; programs, policies and procedures; and implementation of programs, policies and procedures. You can adapt the questions to fit your school's context as needed, and/or add or remove questions as desired.

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