

CORE FUNCTION	EFFECTIVE PRACTICE	INDICATOR
Quality Schools	Effective and Personalized Instruction—Schools provide more personalized instruction matched to student needs and aspirations	The District works with the school to provide early and intensive intervention for students not making progress. (13)

Explanation: Most schools have implemented early intervention strategies to bring appropriate programs and services to the aid of students not making progress. The district role is to see that these intervention strategies are universally applied and are effective. Facility in analyzing student data is important, but typically only identifies the problem. Solving the problem means having ready a menu of instructional supports, differentiating instruction to meet student needs, extending learning time, and providing tutoring and other support services.

Questions: Do all district schools employ a systematic approach to detecting students having academic difficulty? Is the system universally and effectively implemented? Is the menu of responses sufficient for the range of difficulties students encounter? Does the district oversee this process to ensure that all schools implement them effectively?

Clear district expectations that students meet standards must be accompanied by efforts to help students falling behind. While this is likely a part of every district’s efforts, the approach used in the high-performing districts was characterized by an especially tight alignment between intervention and other aspects of the instructional process. In addition, the emphasis was on ensuring students were not left so far behind that they could never catch up. Thus, they provide clear lessons for other districts.

Efforts typically began with the recognition that waiting for data from the state assessment program would not allow for timely intervention. To address this problem, districts moved forward with the development and administration of periodic benchmark assessments, analysis of results to establish instructional needs, and provision of special services to students who needed them.

Districts supported the development of these processes through training of teachers and other staff in ways to generate and use data. Frequent formative and diagnostic mini-assessments allowed teachers to identify which students had – or had not – mastered content. In one district, a teacher-developed approach to monitoring student progress and addressing needs identified became a central focus for school improvement. This process included decision points at which students were provided with additional instructional opportunities if mastery was not achieved.

Another district developed an ongoing system in the elementary schools intended to provide students with practice as they worked to mastery on math concepts. The practice sheets were then used by teachers to gauge the progress of individual students. Depending on their level of need, students were provided with a range of interventions. Some of these were substantial, such as after-school or summer school programs. Others happened on a more fluid basis. For example, in one middle school, teachers of each team of 150 students discussed students on their team almost daily and reshuffled students to provide 30 minutes of tutorial time focused on students’ individual instructional needs.

Sometimes district support for these approaches was financial. For example, some districts funded district-wide initiatives for extended day programs for students falling behind. Sometimes, additional financial support was allocated to schools, with schools selecting options such as a computer-based package to provide struggling students with more opportunities for reading practice.



District support was also embedded in projects such as the development of mini-assessments that required teacher time – but which provided timely data for use in assessing student needs on an ongoing basis.

For English Language Learners

Districts should create a comprehensive set of performance objectives for ELLs, grounded in what is typical progress for ELLs, as well as a thorough plan to guide their progress and attainment that will ensure consistency within any given school in the district and across schools in the district. The district might consider adding specific interventions designed for ELLs when ELLs are not making progress. For example, more first language instruction, ELL focused vocabulary instruction, after school and in-class tutoring, bilingual translators, instructional aides, extended school day and more intensive literacy instruction.

If the school finds the need for intensive intervention for the majority of ELLs, it should consider examining and reforming its programming for ELLs to ensure that their needs are being met. For example, bilingual/dual language instruction, sheltered instruction, content-based ESL instruction, meta-linguistics, and/or explicit teaching of academic language can be considered. In addition, consider a coaching program to assist classroom teachers to improve their instruction to ELLs.

Research conducted by The Council of the Great City Schools indicated that districts that were successful with ELLs proactively encouraged collaboration across departments and among all teachers so that the ELL department was not isolated from the rest of the school. Furthermore, the district can support the notion that assessments should be designed to provide teachers and schools with information about student learning rather than being used to simply rank students. This new perspective will require ESL specialists to be included in the process which will ensure that students' linguistic and cultural needs will be considered. Districts must also ensure that teachers are trained on how to interpret and analyze assessments so that they can provide the necessary and appropriate interventions and differentiate instruction for ELLs.

References and Resources

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