



Indicator: The district sets district, school, and student subgroup achievement targets. (7)

Explanation: District leadership must develop consensus around achievable but ambitious goals that address the performance of all students within the district. Short- and longer-term goals that are measureable and clearly communicated throughout the district help steer the school improvement course towards enhanced learning outcomes. It is imperative that districts disaggregate performance data to ensure that the district is targeting equitable outcomes for student subgroups that are often traditionally underserved.

Questions: Does your district set annual achievement goals/targets for the district, each school, and each student subgroup (district-wide and within each school)? Who is involved in setting the goals/targets? Are both shorter-term and longer-term goals in place, and are they clearly stated and measureable? Does the district have goals/targets that reach beyond minimal performance standards? How does the district gauge progress towards these goals/targets? How are the goals/targets communicated to district and school personnel, as well as to the surrounding school community? Do goals/targets address the performance of each identified student subgroup?

School leaders, including district administrators, exert a powerful influence on student learning and play a significant role in taking student learning successes to scale (Hitt & Tucker, 2016; Louis, et al., 2010). Effective district leadership includes developing a shared vision and consensus around achievable goals, monitoring progress, and ensuring that these goals remain at the forefront of district and school decision-making (Hitt & Tucker, 2016; Leithwood, 2010; Leithwood & Sun, 2012). District leaders “must clarify the mission, collaboratively develop the vision or the way to achieve [each] school’s purpose, and celebrate practices consistent with the goals and targets identified by the organization” (Gohlman, 2018, p. 20). Goals help clarify improvement targets and build a sense of shared common purpose throughout the district (Latham & Locke, 2006), and establishing goals and setting expectations has been shown through research to have a moderately important effect on achievement (Robinson, Lloyd, & Rowe, 2008). Educators at all levels, including teachers, should be actively involved in the goal-setting process to ensure that the school improvement design is strengthened, and to increase support and buy-in from other educators (Sebring, Alensworth, Bryk, Easton, & Luppescu, 2006). This process of discerning goals and objectives brings the vision to life and can foster shared meaning among educators; it is critical also that these shared goals are clearly communicated throughout the district’s schools (Leithwood, 2012).

Districts should use data to set short- and long-term achievement targets for the district as a whole, individual schools, and student subpopulations (Cawelti & Protheroe, 2007). Short-term targets provide ongoing measures of progress while “loftier” goals (e.g., all students that graduate are ready for college) demonstrate the longer view of what the district is working towards. Goals must be clearly written and measurable, and address school and district challenges using high quality data (Bottoms & Schmidt-Davis, 2010). District leadership must consistently communicate a message of high expectations with no excuses, and may offer examples of high achievement success of neigh-

boring schools with at-risk populations as evidence that the goal of high achievement can be attained (Cawelti & Protheroe, 2007; Wong, 2007). Student learning goals must be ambitious and go beyond minimal standardized test proficiency levels (Louis, et al., 2010). A cross-sector study found that successful school turnaround leaders choose “a few high priority goals with visible payoffs and use early success to gain momentum, motivate staff, and disempower naysayers” (Kowal, Hassel, & Hassel, 2009, p. 4).

State accountability systems often include only overall school performance on indicators (e.g., the number of students graduating from high school who are college/career ready); districts must ensure that a school’s overall performance does not mask the performance of traditionally underserved students (Alliance for Excellent Education, 2015). Districts must provide disaggregated data for student subgroups, and goals must target achievement of students in these subgroups in order to work towards equitable outcomes for all students (Datnow & Park, 2014). For example, goals must often target the improvement of EL student performance, and data disaggregated for this group of students should be used to improve programming.

References and Resources

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