

Establishing Team Structures to Drive Improvement

Center on Innovation & Improvement

Teams at both the district and school levels, when effectively purposed, organized, and supervised, provide an infrastructure for continuous improvement. District teams' decisions can be informed by input from the school teams.

Marzano (2003) points out that leadership should not reside with one individual; a team approach to planning and decision making allows for distributive leadership. While principals in effective schools promote staff collaboration, teachers working with less effective instructional leaders function more as individuals than as members of a school team—"in the less successful schools, teachers were often left completely alone to plan what to teach, with little guidance from their senior colleagues and little coordination with other teachers" (Rutter et al., 1979, p. 136). Collaborative activities that do occur in these less successful schools are more socially based and less professionally oriented than the exchanges that occur in schools with more effective instructional leaders.

Schmoker (1996) recommends that teams of teachers implement, assess, and adjust instruction in short-term cycles of improvement—not annually, but continuously. Common team tasks include intensive efforts to align content taught across grades, and development of interim and diagnostic mini-assessments to monitor student progress on a continuing basis. Practices such as the development of agendas and minutes and the use of organized procedures for meetings help the teams stay focused and maintain a history of team work.

Planning and decision making within the district and school require *teams, time, and access to timely information*. That is, decision-making groups must be organized and given time to plan and monitor the parts of the system for which they are responsible. Hassel et al. (2006) provide useful tools to begin the change process and get planning teams started.

A basic structure for team planning, work, and decision making in a school includes a Leadership Team, Instructional Teams, and a team focused on the family-school connection (such as a School Community Council).

- The Leadership Team is typically comprised of the principal and team leaders from the Instructional Teams (grade level or subject area teams). The Leadership Team may also function as the School Improvement Team, with parent members attending meetings scheduled for purposes of reviewing and amending the school improvement plan.
- 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.
- A School Community Council is comprised of the principal, counselor, social worker, teachers, and parents (typical configuration), with parents constituting the majority of the membership. The School Community Council advises, plans, and assists with matters related to the school-home compact, homework, open houses, parent-teacher conferences, school-home communication, and parent education (including training and information about learning standards and the parents' role in supporting children's learning at home).

Action Principles

For District

1. Address district and school team structures and expectations in official district policy.
2. Expect teams to sustain their operation even through changes in district and school leadership.
3. Provide adequate time for teams to meet, conduct business, and meet the expectations of district policy.
4. Require teams to prepare and maintain documentation of meeting agendas, minutes, and work products.
5. Provide professional development for district and school personnel on effective teaming practices.

6. Include successful engagement of teams and evidence of their productivity in evaluation of district and school administrators.
7. Systematize the regular reporting of the work of school and district teams to the school board.

For School

1. Incorporate team structures into the school improvement plan and school governance policy.
2. Develop written statements of purpose and by-laws for each team's operation.
3. Provide teams with work plans for the year and specific work products to produce.
4. Insure that all teams prepare agendas for their meetings, maintain minutes, and catalog their work products.
5. Maintain a file of the agendas, work products, and minutes of all teams.
6. Provide adequate time for teams to meet, conduct business, and meet the expectations of district and school policy. A rule of thumb is that Leadership Teams and School Community Councils meet twice each month for an hour each meeting; Instructional Teams meet twice each month for 45 minutes to conduct business and for blocks of time of 4 to 6 hours each month to review student learning data and develop and refine instructional plans.
7. Insure that teams receive timely access to information, including student progress data and summaries of classroom observations.
8. Provide professional development on effective teaming practices.

References and Resources

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