Indicator: Instructional Teams use student learning data to assess strengths and weaknesses of the curriculum and instructional strategies. (106)

Explanation: The teacher Instructional Teams develop instructional plans aligned with a standards-based curriculum. They adjust the plans based on an analysis of the strategies and materials used and the results in student learning. Student learning is best gauged by formative assessments, including assessment embedded in the instructional activities. Benchmark and annual assessments are also of value in making these determinations.

Questions: Do your Instructional Teams continuously evaluate the effectiveness of their instructional plans based on an analysis of the strategies used and the results in student outcomes? Do they include frequent formative assessments, including those embedded in their instructional activities? Does the school provide common templates and guidance for this work? How is the work of the Instructional Teams reviewed?

“Using data to drive improvement” was identified as a key to success in a report developed by the National Education Goals Panel after a series of hearings designed to ferret out examples of successful schools and to understand the probable causes for those successes. Specifically, the successful schools “use performance information to determine where they were succeeding and where they needed to direct their efforts for improvement” (Rothman, 2000, i).

Schools have invested heavily in curriculum alignment, mapping their curricula to standards, benchmarks, and specific items of standards-based assessment. The resulting alignment is a set of data, a body of information carefully organized, that helps answer the question “What do we expect a student to know?” The challenge that lies ahead for most schools is to draw further connections between the aligned curriculum, the taught curriculum, the most efficacious instructional strategies, and the mastery evidenced by the individual student. This must be done in a way that assures that all students achieve the expected level of mastery while allowing each student ample opportunity to soar beyond that minimum expectation. The linkage from curriculum to instruction is tenuous in many schools, and insufficient systems are in place for capturing information about what is taught, how it is taught, and how it might best be learned by an individual student. The research literature provides a wealth of information on instructional practices, but the usefulness of this information cannot be assumed from its abundance. Matching particular practices to the subject area, grade level, and students’ prior learning can be a massive undertaking, leaving too much unproductive chaff in the bushel of productive grain. In the end, the teacher must hit the target where content, instructional mode, and learner requisites optimally meet. A DBDM [data-based decision-making] system can help a teacher hit the target. Monitoring the application of targeted learning strategies by teachers can help a school refine its professional development processes and improve its teachers’ effectiveness. 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. Instructional Teams need time for two purposes: (1) meetings, and (2) curricular and instructional planning. A 45-minute meeting twice a month is ideal.
for maintaining communication and organizing the work at hand, operating with agendas, minutes, and focus. In addition, a block of 4 to 6 hours of time once a month is necessary for curricular and instructional planning, and additional whole days before and after the school year are a great advantage (Redding, 2006).

The National Joint Committee on Learning Disabilities said in its 2011 report “Comprehensive assessment and evaluation of students with learning disabilities,” The purpose of a comprehensive assessment and evaluation is to accurately identify a student’s patterns of strengths and needs. The term assessment is used in many different contexts for a variety of purposes in educational settings, including individual and group, standardized and informal, and formative and summative. Some professionals use assessment broadly to include both assessment and evaluation. For this paper, we are differentiating assessment and evaluation to underscore the sequence, procedures, and decisions involved in a comprehensive process. Assessment is used in this paper to refer to the collection of data through the use of multiple measures, including standardized and informal instruments and procedures. These measures yield comprehensive quantitative and qualitative data about an individual student. The results of continuous progress monitoring also may be used as part of individual and classroom assessments. Information from many of these sources of assessment data can and should be used to help ensure that the comprehensive assessment and evaluation accurately reflects how an individual student is performing. Evaluation follows assessment and incorporates information from all data sources. In this paper, evaluation refers to the process of integrating, interpreting, and summarizing the comprehensive assessment data, including indirect and preexisting sources. The major goal of assessment and evaluation is to enable team members to use data to create a profile of a student’s strengths and needs. The student profile informs decisions about identification, eligibility, services, and instruction. Comprehensive assessment and evaluation procedures are both critical for making an accurate diagnosis of students with learning disabilities. Procedures that are not comprehensive can result in identification of some individuals as having learning disabilities when they do not, and conversely, exclude some individuals who do have specific learning disabilities” (National Joint Committee on Learning Disabilities, 2011).

For Special Education

For special education teachers, using student learning data to assess strengths and weaknesses of the curriculum and instructional strategies should be an integral part of the IEP process. Teachers who use student data for progress monitoring are easily able to write meaningful, measurable goals and objectives for their students. Having reliable and valid student learning data (i.e., CBM) can (a) support IEP teams in meeting legal mandates for progress monitoring; (b) give teachers an alternative to holistic and percent-correct measures that impose artificial ceilings; (c) provide measures that are valid, reliable, and sensitive to incremental changes; (d) provide a “picture” of student performance to facilitate sharing of information about progress with students, families, and other IEP team members. Use of student learning data also improves instruction by informing teachers of the need to change or improve teaching strategies (Deno, 2003). The IEP document itself is only useful if it is an effective tool for instruction, that is, if it is created not only to fulfill the letter of the law but also as a guide to produce student progress and achievement (Hessler & Konrad, 2008).

In his 2013 Teacher Evaluation Model, Marzano has in “Domain 2: Planning and Preparing,” Element 7: “Planning and Preparing for the Needs of Special Education Students.” It stresses, “The teacher identifies the needs of special education students by providing accommodations and modifications that must be made for specific special education students.”

A recent stressing of the fact that it would be best were special education students mainstreamed (including testing and assessment) comes from the 2013 Canadian Journal of School Psychology article “Mental Health in Schools: Lessons Learned from Exclusion: “Students who are excluded from the daily life of schools are at risk for mental illness. This is especially true for children with disabilities as they are marginalized by assumptions and beliefs about what they “cannot” do at school as opposed to what they can do. This article presents research literature on belonging, inclusion, and social and emotional learning as a backdrop to the call to school psychologists to reinvent their roles. Although this call has been issued, the practice of assessment for special education placement remains one of the top job demands.
Rather than categorizing and labeling, psychologists can be a key supporter of classroom teachers in promoting successful academic, social, and emotional strategies to assist teachers in inclusive classrooms” (Specht, 2013).

For English Language Learners

Teachers must examine a variety of ELL data to make instructional decisions. Teachers should use multiple assessments to measure English language learners’ progress in achieving academic standards, and in attaining English proficiency. Assessment results should be used to inform classroom teaching, monitor student progress, and communicate with families.

References and other resources


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