

CORE FUNCTION	EFFECTIVE PRACTICE	INDICATOR
School Leadership and Decision Making	Establish a team structure with specific duties and time for instructional planning	<b>A team structure for schools is officially incorporated into the school governance policy. (36)</b>

Research has consistently demonstrated that a collaborative school culture, with educators working together in teams, is linked to higher levels of student achievement (DuFour, 2011; Goddard et al., 2015; Ronfeldt et al., 2015). Sparks (2013) describes the power of teams within schools:

Schools will improve for the benefit of every student only when every leader and every teacher is a member of one or more strong teams that create synergy in problem solving, provide emotional and practical support, distribute leadership to better tap the talents of members of the school community, and promote the interpersonal accountability that is necessary for continuous improvement. Such teamwork not only benefits students, it also creates the “supportive leadership” and the process and time for meaningful collaboration that enable teachers to thrive and are better able to address the complex challenges of their work. (p. 28)

School improvement therefore depends, in part, on how well teachers work together with their principal and colleagues (Louis et al., 2010). Research shows that when principals work with a team of teachers, forming school-based leadership teams, the speed at which improvement efforts occur is increased (Pedersen et al., 2010). Further, school leadership models are more effective when they distribute responsibilities to a team, rather than promoting unilateral decisions and actions (Hanover Research, 2013; Leithwood et al., 2019; The Wallace Foundation, 2013). Such a distributed system allows individuals to contribute in their areas of particular strength or interest (Institute for Educational Leadership, 2001; Spillane et al., 2018); this expertise is best engaged wherever it exists in an organization rather than seeking it only in a formal role or structure (Harris, 2004). Leadership teams also must have structures that require specific duties for team members, and sufficient time for planning.

A basic structure for team planning, work, and school decision-making may include the following (see Redding, 2007):



- **Instructional Teams:** 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 (for example, Professional Learning Communities).
- **Leadership Team:** 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.
- **A School Community Council:** comprised of the principal, counselor, social worker, teachers, and parents (typical configuration), with parents making up 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).

While teams structures provide the opportunity for truly collaborative work, lack of teacher and administrator training on how teams function effectively can present a barrier to this work (Troen & Boles, 2011). Professional learning that addresses how to construct effective teams may be necessary (Sparks, 2013). Research shows that effective teams have 1) a task focus (typically focused on goals for student learning; 2) leadership (distributed among all members); 3) collaborative climate (all members willing to engage in conflict resolution; 4) personal accountability (and shared responsibility for all team members working collectively); and, 5) clearly defined structures and processes (articulated goals for student learning and processes for task execution) (Troen & Boles, 2011). Instructional teams can facilitate school improvement when they facilitate in-depth interactions among teachers regarding instructional improvement by enabling teachers to share expertise, extend what is learned from professional development, and discuss new material and practices (Penuel et al., 2012; Sun et al., 2014).

Intentional planning is required to ensure organization and collaboration among classroom teachers, principals, and teacher-leaders within team structures; school districts should primarily be responsible for creating infrastructures and expectations to support the work of instructional improvement (Spillane et al., 2015). Teams need clear expectations for their purposes and roles for team members, as well as clear definitions of explicit team practices they will execute (Redding, 2007; Sparks, 2013; Troen & Boles, 2011; Yager & Yager, 2011). Documentation of the school's teams and how they function is an important



component of effective school leadership. The school’s governance policy should include a description of all teams and how they are structured; this ensures that these structures will endure through school leadership changes (Redding, 2007).

DuFour (2011) reflects on the importance of these team structures for school improvement:

In order to establish schools in which interdependence and collaboration are the new norm, we must create the structures and cultures that embed collaboration in the routine practice of our schools, ensure that the collaborative efforts focus on the right work, and support educators as they build their capacity to work together rather than alone. (p. 61)

### ***Connecting the Research to Our Practice: Assessing Your School’s Needs Related to This Indicator***

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 two areas: data review 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.

<b><i>I. What Data are Currently Being Provided?</i></b>	
<i>Questions to Consider</i>	<i>Discussion of Data/Responses</i>
1. What do school climate or other data reveal about the level and quality of collaboration/collegiality among your teachers? Are additional data needed to answer this question? *See Ronfeldt et al. (2015), p. 14 for ideas for possible survey items that can be adapted as needed to address this area.	
2. What do collaboration data reveal about the level and quality of collaboration/collegiality by grade level? Content area? Teacher expertise area (e.g., special education or EL)? Are teachers engaging in team meetings in an in-depth manner about	



instruction/learning? Should additional data be collected to assess quality?	
3. Do teachers report that instructional teams are effective at improving instruction?	
4. What do collaboration data reveal about the level and quality of collaboration/collegiality of the school's Leadership Team? School-Community Council or similar team? Other teams?	
<b><i>What needs can you identify based on the responses?</i></b>	



<b><i>II..What Programs, Policies, and Procedures Are Already Being Implemented? How Well Are They Being Implemented?</i></b>	
<i>Questions to Consider</i>	<i>Responses</i>
1. What is the district’s policy for team structures in the school? Are descriptions of the school’s teams included in official school governance policy? Do these descriptions include clearly described team purposes and composition?	
2. What if any professional learning and/or coaching have teachers engaged with to address instructional collaboration? Evidence of effectiveness of these supports? What additional training and/or supports may be needed?	
3. What if any professional learning has the School Leadership Team and School Community Council participated in? Has the PD resulted in effective team functioning? What additional training and supports may be needed?	
<b><i>Consider the data and needs identified from Tables I and II, and responses to these questions. What is needed to foster this effective practice? What gaps (if any) can be identified between what we’re implementing and evidence-based practice?</i></b>	



**What actions, customized for your school’s needs, will ensure that this Success Indicator will be fully met? How will the team monitor implementation and success?**

<i>Begin Date</i>	<i>End Date</i>	<i>Action</i>	<i>Monitoring Process/Data Collected</i>	<i>Desired Outcome/Need Met?</i>

## REFERENCES AND RESOURCES

DuFour, R. (2011). Work together: But only if you want to. *Phi Delta Kappan*, 92(5), 57–61.  
<http://www.allthingsplc.info/files/uploads/KapanMagazineRickDuFour2011.pdf>

Goddard, R., Goddard, Y., Kim, E. S., & Miller, R. (2015). A theoretical and empirical analysis of the roles of instructional leadership, teacher collaboration, and collective efficacy beliefs in support of student learning. *American Journal of Education*, 121(4), 501–530.

Hanover Research. (2013). *Best practices in K-12 leadership structures*. Hanover Research.  
<http://gssaweb.org/webnew/wp-content/uploads/2015/04/Best-Practices-in-K-12-Leadership-Structures.pdf>.

Harris, A. (2004). Distributed leadership and school improvement: Leading or misleading? *Educational Management Administration & Leadership*, 32(1), 11–24.  
[https://www.researchgate.net/profile/Alma\\_Harris/publication/249826646\\_Distributed\\_Leadership\\_in\\_Schools\\_Leading\\_or\\_misleading/links/565e8c1008ae1ef92983dbca.pdf](https://www.researchgate.net/profile/Alma_Harris/publication/249826646_Distributed_Leadership_in_Schools_Leading_or_misleading/links/565e8c1008ae1ef92983dbca.pdf)



- Institute for Educational Leadership. (2001). *Leadership for student learning: Redefining the teacher as leader*. Institute for Educational Leadership. <http://iel.org/sites/default/files/Leadership-for-Student-Learning-Series-2-Teacher-04-2001.pdf>
- Leithwood, K., Harris, A., & Hopkins, D. (2019). Seven strong claims about successful school leadership revisited. *School Leadership and Management*, 40(1), 5–22. [https://www.researchgate.net/publication/332530133\\_Seven\\_strong\\_claims\\_about\\_successful\\_school\\_leadership\\_revisited](https://www.researchgate.net/publication/332530133_Seven_strong_claims_about_successful_school_leadership_revisited)
- Louis, K. S., Leithwood, K., Wahlstrom, K. L., & Anderson, S. E. (2010). *Investigating the links to improved student learning*. The Wallace Foundation. <http://www.wallacefoundation.org/knowledge-center/Documents/Investigating-the-Links-to-Improved-Student-Learning.pdf>
- Pedersen, J., Yager, S., & Yager, R. (2010). Distributed leadership influence on professional development initiatives: Conversations with eight teachers. *Academic Leadership Online Journal*, 8(3).
- Penuel, W. R., Sun, M., Frank, K. A., & Gallagher, H. A. (2012). Using social network analysis to study how collegial interactions can augment teacher learning from external professional development. *American Journal of Education*, 119(1), 103–136.
- Redding, S. (2007). Systems for improved teaching and learning. In H. J. Walberg (Ed.), *Handbook on restructuring and substantial school improvement*, 99–112. Information Age Publishing. <http://www.adi.org/downloads/Restructuring%20Handbook.pdf>
- Ronfeldt, M., Farmer, S. O., McQueen, K., & Grissom, J. A. (2015). Teacher collaboration in instructional teams and student achievement. *American Educational Research Journal*, 52(3), 475–514. <https://citeseerx.ist.psu.edu/viewdoc/download?-doi=10.1.1.921.1537&rep=rep1&type=pdf>
- Sparks, D. (2013). Strong teams, strong schools: Teacher-to-teacher collaboration creates synergy that benefits students. *JSD*, 34(2), 28–30. <https://learningforward.org/docs/default-source/jsd-april-2013/sparks342.pdf>
- Spillane, J. P., Hopkins, M., & Sweet, T. (2015). Intra-and interschool interactions about instruction: Exploring the conditions for social capital development. *American Journal of Education*, 122(1), 71–110.
- Spillane, J. P., Hopkins, M., & Sweet, T. M. (2018). School district educational infrastructure and change at scale: Teacher peer interactions and their beliefs about mathematics instruction. *American Educational Research Journal*, 55(3), 532–571. <https://journals.sagepub.com/doi/pdf/10.3102/0002831217743928>



Sun, M., Wilhelm, A. G., Larson, C. J., & Frank, K. A. (2014). Exploring colleagues' professional influence on mathematics teachers' learning. *Teachers College Record*, 116(6), 1–30.

The Wallace Foundation. (2013). *The school principal as leader: Guiding schools to better teaching and learning*. Perspective. The Wallace Foundation. <http://www.wallacefoundation.org/knowledge-center/Documents/The-School-Principal-as-Leader-Guiding-Schools-to-Better-Teaching-and-Learning-2nd-Ed.pdf>

Troen, V., & Boles, K. C. (2011). Rating your teacher team: Five conditions for effective teams. *Harvard Newsletter*, 27(6). <http://www.schoolleadership20.com/forum/topics/rating-your-teacher-team-five-conditions-for-effective-teams>

Yager, S., & Yager, R. (2011). *Impact of school based leadership teams for implementing a successful professional development initiative*. Connexions Content Commons. National Council of Professors of Educational Administration. <http://files.eric.ed.gov/fulltext/EJ972970.pdf>.

## Resources

College of William and Mary Training and Technical Assistance Center. (2011). *Strategies for creating effective school leadership teams: Considerations packet*. <https://education.wm.edu/centers/ttac/documents/packets/strategiesforCreatingEffectiveSchool-LeadershipTeams.pdf>