



CORE FUNCTION	EFFECTIVE PRACTICE	INDICATOR
School Leadership and Decision Making	Establish a team structure with specific duties and time for instructional planning - Leadership Team	A Leadership Team consisting of the principal, teachers who lead the Instructional Teams, and other key professional staff meets regularly (twice a month or more for an hour each meeting) to review implementation of effective practice. (42)

Explanation: It is essential for the principal to distribute leadership to a team of professionals working within a collaborative culture. Leadership Teams activate the school improvement plan and identify and create strategies to help the school reach its goals. Leadership Teams include the principal, team leaders from all grades/subject areas, and other key professional staff; these teams must have dedicated, frequent, and regular time to meet, and must be granted decision-making authority. Effective Leadership Teams have group norms and structures in place to ensure productive meetings. Team members must address student performance data and conduct classroom observations in order to target professional learning focused on instructional improvement. Effective Leadership Teams help staff grow as leaders within the school, and contribute towards an environment of shared responsibility for student success.

Questions: *Does your school operate with a Leadership Team that includes the principal, teacher leaders, and other staff as appropriate to the size and composition of your school? Are all team members on board with the school improvement process? Does the Leadership Team meet at least twice a month in regularly scheduled meetings of at least an hour? Does participation on your Leadership Team rotate to allow staff to develop within their roles and to allow additional teachers to participate? Has the principal delegated full authority for the Leadership Team to make decisions within their purview? Are meetings structured and productive? How does the Leadership Team analyze student outcome data and observe classroom instruction? How does the team assess its effectiveness towards improving the school?*

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; Hitt & Tucker, 2016). 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. (Sparks, 2013, p. 28)

School improvement therefore depends, in part, on how well teachers work together with their principal and colleagues (Louis, Leithwood, Wahlstrom & Anderson, 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, and reform is more likely to be sustained (Edwards & Gammell, 2016; Pedersen, Yager, & Yager, 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; 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).



How should Leadership Teams be established?

Leadership teams set the course for school improvement by taking responsibility for activating the school improvement plan and coordinating faculty efforts to reach its goals (Munger & von Frank, 2010; von Frank, 2011). These responsibilities include developing a vision, setting goals, designing strategies, and monitoring the improvement process (Edwards & Gammell, 2016). Leadership teams are typically comprised of between 5 and 10 members, and include the principal and team leaders from the Instructional Teams (grade level or subject area teams), as well as other key professional staff. Participation should rotate (e.g., every three years) to allow staff to develop within their roles and to give other staff the opportunity to develop their leadership skills and empower a larger portion of the school community (Edwards & Gammell, 2016; Munger & von Frank, 2010). The development of strong leadership teams requires a careful examination of potential members' knowledge, attitudes, and skills; these teams should also represent staff, student, and community diversity to allow for multiple viewpoints and smoother implementation of change initiatives (Chenoweth & Everhart, 2002; Edwards & Gammell, 2016). While principals may select team members, they may wish to first ask for volunteers who are committed to the change process and willing to serve (Marzano, Waters, & McNulty, 2005; von Frank, 2011). Leadership teams should consist of staff who are committed to school-wide change, respected by colleagues, show leadership potential, bring a unique or specialized perspective to the team, and have strong interpersonal skills and the capacity for follow-through on projects (Chenoweth & Everhart, 2002; McKeever, 2003).

What makes Leadership Teams effective?

The principal must first and foremost grant authority to the leadership team to make decisions within their scope of work (Cotton, 2003). Leadership teams then must “agree upon their mission and ways of working and document those agreements. All members...need to be clear about the team’s purpose, goals, method and frequency of communication, decision-making protocols, and means of holding each other accountable” (Edwards & Gammell, 2016, p. 21). These established group norms should also have structures in place that can ensure productive team meetings, such as an agenda shared prior to the meetings, assigned roles of facilitator, recorder (if possible, someone not involved in the work of the team), and timekeeper, and established ways to share progress and information with stakeholders and elicit their feedback (Turning Points, 2001). Facilitators of leadership teams can enhance meeting effectiveness by conducting brief feedback assessments at the end of each meeting that address participants’ perceptions of the meeting’s impact and elicit their suggestions for improvement (Kelley, 2010). Leadership teams need ample and protected time to meet regularly (e.g., twice a month or more for a minimum of one hour) for critical conversations, observations, and collaboration; staff on these teams benefit from additional funding to support their work as they often must take time away from their own instructional planning to fulfill their role on the team (Edwards & Gammell, 2016; Redding, 2007).

Leadership teams must have a laser focus on instruction-related concerns, and collect data on patterns and trends in academic performance and quality of classroom instruction (e.g., through classroom, or learning walk-throughs), and select and design targeted professional learning opportunities (Edwards & Gammell, 2016). Leadership teams are recommended to conduct classroom learning walk-throughs that are separate from those conducted by an administrator to avoid a sense of formal evaluation and keep teachers at ease (Munger & von Frank, 2010). Effective leadership teams foster professional growth, both for the team members themselves and for their colleagues (Edwards & Gammell, 2016; von Frank, 2011). Teachers who participate on leadership teams grow professionally because their team activities require them to work from a systems perspective rather than focus exclusively on a single classroom, and participation can keep good teachers in the classroom while they develop their leadership skills simultaneously. Leadership teams must also ensure that they communicate effectively with their colleagues by establishing formal lines of communication between the leadership and instructional teams, and welcoming their input (Edwards & Gammell, 2016). Finally, effective school leadership teams hold themselves accountable by engaging in self-assessment of the team’s functioning, and most importantly, hold themselves accountable for improvement in student learning outcomes (Kelley, 2010).

The work of leadership teams can foster an environment focused on mutual accountability for student success, as described within Edison Middle School in Wisconsin:

The team—administrators and representatives from various departments--researched instructional strategies around identified areas for improvement, specifically strategies for reading informational



text. Team members recommended several strategies to the faculty as a whole, and Smith [the school's principal] said individual teachers then selected the one or two strategies they felt they could best use. The approach has changed professional learning in the school, Smith said. "It's no longer a passive learning opportunity," Smith said. When Edison teachers focus on professional learning, they work with and watch one another. The new leadership team maintains a clearly defined focus on instruction and nurturing teacher learning around improved practice. (von Frank, 2011 p. 5)

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Resources

Both resources contain tools to use to develop and maintain effective school leadership teams:

- 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/strategiesforCreatingEffectiveSchoolLeadershipTeams.pdf>
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