CORE FUNCTION	EFFECTIVE PRACTICE	INDICATOR
School Leadership and Decision Making	Establish a team structure with specific duties and time for instructional planning	**Teachers are organized into grade-level, grade-level cluster, or subject-area Instructional Teams. (46)**

Instructional teams that consist of groups of teachers organized into grade-levels, grade-level clusters, or subject-areas provide an opportunity for teachers to work collectively to improve instruction and student achievement (Hamilton et al., 2009). Hattie (2012) suggests that "Within a school, we need to collaborate to build a team working together to solve the dilemmas in learning, to collectively share and critique the nature and quality of evidence that shows our impact on student learning, and to cooperate in planning and critiquing lessons, learning intentions, and success criteria on a regular basis" (p. 172). Research has consistently demonstrated that a collaborative school culture, with educators working together in teams, is linked to stronger instruction and higher student achievement (DuFour, 2011; Goddard et al., 2007; Hitt & Tucker, 2016; Ronfeldt et al., 2015; Sun et al., 2013). The Standards for Professional Learning (Learning Forward, 2011) reflect this research and include a Learning Communities standard that addresses the "impact of collective responsibility for student success, continuous improvement, and shared accountability" (Killion, 2015). Instructional teams often operate as Professional Learning Communities (PLCs) (DuFour, 2011; DuFour & Mattos, 2013), but have also been referred to as professional learning networks and communities of practice (Hirsh, 2018). Collaborative structures enhance the chances of providing the excellent teaching and learning opportunities for all students that are required for school improvement (Hirsh, 2018).

How can school leaders ensure that the school operates with high quality teams that can enhance instruction and student achievement?

Quality implementation of instructional teams is essential for instructional change and subsequent improvement of student learning (Ronfeldt et al., 2015). Ronfeldt et al. (2015) observed in their large-scale research of over 9000 teachers and 336 schools in Miami-Dade County public schools, that schools with better quality collaboration across instructional domains also had stronger achievement gains. In some schools which have purportedly implemented PLCs, for example, "PLC-Lite" is in place, and evidence-based collaboration strategies are non-existent (DuFour & Reeves, 2016). Research demonstrates that simply providing time for teachers to meet does not impact student learning; teacher collaboration within team meetings must be structured and focused on "the right work" (DuFour & Reeves, 2016; Saunders, Goldenberg, & Gallimore, 2009). In a recent review of the

literature, Ronfeldt et al. (2015) identified two types of instructional team collaboration that are likely to promote gains in student learning:

- **Collaboration in which teachers analyze student data and develop instructional responses to address the data**. Teachers use both formal assessment data and informal observations of student learning to determine students' learning needs and design ways that these needs can be addressed through changes to instructional practice. Effective PLCs are those in which teachers collaborate with a clear and consistent focus on student learning data (Harris et al., 2018; Hirsh, 2018; Vescio et al., 2008). However, for significant achievement gains to occur, teachers will likely need training and support in order to engage in frequent and structured collaboration around student data (Saunders et al., 2009).
- **Collaboration centered on curriculum and instructional decision-making**. In order for teaming to impact student achievement, teams should maintain high levels of group instructional practices, such as co-teaching, selecting instructional methods, evaluating curriculum, preparing together for instruction, observing colleagues, and using flexible student grouping practices for instructional practice (Goddard et al., 2007; Hirsh, 2018; Supovitz, 2002).

DuFour and Reeves (2016) note that educators working in PLCs recognize they must:

1. Work together in collaborative teams rather than in isolation and take collective responsibility for student learning.
2. Establish a guaranteed and viable curriculum that specifies the knowledge, skills, and dispositions students are expected to acquire, unit by unit.
3. Use an assessment process that includes frequent, team-developed, common formative assessments based on the guaranteed and viable curriculum.
4. Use the results of common formative assessments to identify
    - Students who need additional time and support to become proficient.
    - Students who need enrichment and extension of their learning because they're already highly proficient.
    - Teachers who help students achieve at high levels so team members can examine those teachers' practices, as well as teachers who struggle so that team members can assist the teacher in addressing the issue.
    - Skills or concepts that none of the team members were able to help students achieve at the intended level, so the team can expand its learning beyond its members to become

more effective in teaching those skills or concepts. The team can seek help from members of other teams in the building with relevant expertise in these areas, specialists from the central office, other teachers of the same content in the district, or networks of teachers throughout the U.S. that they can interact with online.

5. Create a system of interventions that ensures that all students who struggle receive additional time and support for learning in ways that do not remove them from new direct instruction, regardless of the teacher to whom they have been assigned.

Dufour and Reeves (2016) also recommend that PLC work within collaborative teams should be focused on addressing the following four questions:

1. What do we want students to learn?
2. How will we know if they have learned it?
3. What will we do if they have not learned it?
4. How will we provide extended learning opportunities for students who have mastered the content?

They note that "meetings that only address standards, that focus entirely on disciplinary issues and parent complaints, or that center on employee issues may be very interesting, but they do not represent the work of high-performing PLCs" (p. 70).

Principal leadership may be a key factor in laying a foundation for instructional teams' effectiveness (Benoliel & Berkovich, 2016; Johnson et al., 2016). One study of teams in schools in high-poverty, high-minority communities with intense accountability pressures found that effectiveness was determined by principals' involvement and their engagement in practices such as encouraging a clear and meaningful purpose for the team, attending and participating in team meetings, and encouraging teachers to focus on their own professional learning as they work with colleagues to improve performance (Charner-Laird et al., 2017). School leaders also must provide sufficient and consistent time for teacher collaboration in instructional groups in order to achieve significant student achievement gains (Saunders, et al., 2009). Unfortunately a recent national study revealed that only slightly more than one-third of teachers (38%) report sufficient time to collaborate with their colleagues (Johnston & Tsai, 2018). Team members need a dedicated block of at least one hour for grade-level collaborative team time per week embedded within the professional workday rather than after school (Larson, et al., 2012). To free up sufficient time for collaboration without additional money or loss of instructional time, elementary schools have adopted strategies such as

- **Parallel scheduling**: Grade-level teachers have a common planning time by assigning specialists (e.g., art, music, etc.) to work with students within the entire grade at the same time,

with the grade-level team then designating one day each week for collaborative, rather than individual, planning;

- **Shared classes**: Students across two different grade levels are combined into one class while the other team engages in collaborative work once per week; and,
- **Extended faculty meeting time**: Time is scheduled for team collaboration during faculty meeting time, shifting the focus of faculty meetings from administrative communication to professional learning for teachers. (Larson et al., 2012, p. 8)

PLC leadership is also an important consideration. PLC leaders need "a strong understanding of schoolwide goals and priorities and the ability to translate them to the specific focus area of their team, [and] skills in group facilitation and in instructional leadership, leading teachers in data-driven practice improvement" (Minnesota Department of Education, 2018, p. 6).

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. You can adapt the questions below to fit your school's context as needed, and/or add or remove questions as desired. *This tool may be useful as you identify how teams are functioning in your school, determine where things are working, and what needs to be improved.*

I. What Data are Currently Being Provided?	
Questions to Consider	*Discussion of Data/Responses*
1. Are teachers on Instructional Teams satisfied with their teams' functioning and effectiveness? Do they feel adequately prepared to serve on these teams in an effective way? What if any barriers	

do they report that prevent high-quality work within instructional teams?	
2. What other data are available regarding the degree to which the school's Instructional Teams /PLCs are operating using evidence-based practices? Do these teams' work products indicate true collaboration around instruction or "PLC lite?"	
What needs can you identify based on the responses?	

II. What (if any) Programs, Policies, or Procedures Are Already Being Implemented and How Well Are They Being Implemented?	
Questions to Consider	*Responses/Success with Implementation*
1. What are the current school policies regarding expectations for the	

work of Instructional Teams? Are these expectations aligned with the 5 principles described by DuFour & Reeves (2016)?	
2. Are teachers within Instructional Teams considering the 4 questions that drive the work of truly collaborative teams in a PLC (as opposed to PLC lite)?	
3. What if any professional development has been provided to support teachers' work in PLCs/instructional teams? Is there evidence that it was effective?	
4. How do the principal and/or other school leaders support the work of Instructional Teams/PLCs? How is additional time freed up to allow for high-quality and	

intensive work within teams?	
Consider the data and needs identified from Table I, and responses to these questions. What gaps (if any) can be identified between what we're implementing and evidence-based practice?	

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?

Begin Date	*End Date*	*Action*	*Monitoring Process/Data Collected*	*Desired Outcome/Need Met?*

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Resources

For an example of several states' approach to promoting team collaboration, see:

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