

Creating an Indicator of Effective Practice

The functions of a district or school are often categorized into domains, with sub-categories that contain standards of practice based on research that attests to the effectiveness of the practices. For example, Leadership and Decision-Making, Curriculum and Instruction, and Culture and Community might be big, chunky domains within which the work of the district or school is organized. At the school level, Curriculum and Instruction might be further sub-divided into categories such as Alignment, Classroom (Formative) Assessment, Differentiated Instruction, Periodic (Benchmark) Assessment, Instructional Delivery, Communication with Parents and Homework, and Classroom Management. This more detailed set of sub-categories fleshes out the school's functions in a way that enables school personnel to see the relationships among the functions and focus on improvement.

But categories and sub-categories are still a couple levels away from understanding effective practice. So standards of practice further clarify what is most effective within a sub-category. For example, under Alignment, we might find a standard of practice such as "Curriculum, assessment, and instruction are aligned to standards." Now we are ready for even more specificity, with indicators of effective practice that "show" what this alignment might look like and how it is achieved. For example, "Instructional Teams develop standards-aligned units of instruction for each subject and grade level" would be *one* indication of effective alignment.

An indicator of effective practice is a concrete, behavioral expression of a professional practice that research demonstrates contributes to student learning. An indicator is expressed in plain language so that a school team can answer with certainty whether or not it is standard practice in the school.

When developing indicators of effective practice, the following questions provide a guiding rubric:

1. Is it stated in plain language, free of jargon?
2. Is it a concrete manifestation of an "effective practice" rather than a component of a program?
3. Does it state exactly what is asked of whom? In other words, is the indicator behavioral as opposed to philosophical? Are the "actors" stated? "All teachers. . ." for example. Or "The principal . . ." Or "The leadership team . . ." If the actor isn't stated, is it obvious who would be accountable for the indicator?
4. Can full implementation be assessed with a clear Yes or No answer?
5. Could we align this indicator with research that attests to the importance of the indicator in student learning? Or is it more of a rule, regulation, somebody's good idea? Sometimes it is necessary to provide some building block indicators that are difficult to directly align with research but that are necessary to set the stage for other indicators that are more research based. Still, the indicators should be kept as close to a logical connection to research on student learning as possible.
6. Is every indicator absolutely necessary as either a direct contributor to student learning or a building block to other indicators that do directly contribute to student learning?