

# ***Tools for Quality Practice: Improved Teaching & Learning in ALL Kansas Schools***



## **Overview:**

The search for techniques and programs that can improve student learning in reading, mathematics, and other areas is an integral part of the work of educators today. Over time, though, we have come to realize that there is no panacea – no single solution to school improvement that works in every situation and with each student. Research in recent years has considered systemic factors at the school and district level that either support or hinder attempts to increase student achievement.

This guide provides information to assist with school improvement on both the “micro” level – improved learning for specific subjects and skills – and on the “macro” level – school organization and culture that fosters success. In this section entitled “Improved Teaching and Learning in All Kansas Schools”, we’ll explore the foundation and suggest areas for more in-depth study of best practices that have been identified.

## **The challenge:**

School improvement that is sustained over time, reaches higher cognitive levels of student learning, extends beyond a single subject, and raises student achievement broadly while closing the achievement gap between groups does not occur by happenstance. Schools can and do achieve high levels of student learning regardless of the demographics of the student population – overcoming the effects of poverty and external environmental factors that challenge a child’s ability to focus on learning is a significant task that requires system-wide effort and commitment. Several important characteristics are present in schools that succeed

“Even the most well meaning and enthusiastic teachers are unable to sustain serious changes in their practices in the context of school organizations that are (usually inadvertently) hostile to those changes” (Kenneth Leithwood, 2002 in *The Keys to Effective Schools*, p. 106). At the heart of sustained school improvement and student achievement will always be an administrative leadership that supports innovation and collaboration. With appropriate administrative support, staff become full partners in the design and implementation of the school’s programs and culture. Leadership is a concept that extends from administrative roles to respected professionals in

instructional and support positions and even to students and parents who place a high value on learning.

### **Organization of this resource:**

For these reasons, a primary concern of anyone wishing to improve student achievement is the creation of an appropriate organizational structure and cultural basis for school improvement and change. Research, particularly since the mid 1980's, has increasingly focused on necessary conditions for restructuring. In this resource we have utilized the framework developed as a part of KEYS\*\* to organize the recommended resources:

- ◆ Shared Understanding and Commitment to High Goals
- ◆ Open Communication and Collaborative Problem Solving
- ◆ Continuous Assessment for Teaching and Learning
- ◆ Personal and Professional Learning
- ◆ Resources to Support Teaching and Learning
- ◆ Curriculum and Instruction

Suggested readings and a brief summary of each of the six elements above are provided in the text that follows. A final section lists resources that integrate several variables and that provide tools supporting multiple elements from the six part framework.

### **Two cautions in using this resource:**

First: As mentioned, a part of this resource breaks down the organizational and cultural support structure that supports school improvement into six components. This provides a handy way to organize research findings and to discuss critical factors that contribute to success. At the heart of the research base, though, is the fact that these six factors are deeply interrelated. Only a systemic approach that considers all factors is likely to result in meaningful and sustainable improvement.

Second: Suggested resources are provided for further reading with each section in this resource. These are only a sampling of the work in the field, though, and schools that are seeking to create professional learning communities should consider more expansive study of important points and look to original research in addition to summaries and meta-analyses.

\*\*A long-term project to identify necessary conditions for school improvement – KEYS to Effective Schools – was initiated in 1990 and involves analysis of data in schools across the country. A consortium of educators and researchers from numerous schools of education developed a framework and have continued to revise the database and framework through funding from the National Education Association (NEA). Survey tools to assist with school improvement based on KEYS are available through state affiliates of the NEA.

## 1. Shared Understanding and Commitment to High Goals

Recent work on strategies to close the achievement gap has highlighted the importance of a shared belief in the ability of each student to achieve and a commitment to hold students to high standards. Richard Dufour's work on "professional learning communities" integrates several of the six keys to school improvement. He calls on faculty to ask "what will we do when a student does not succeed?" The persistent pursuit of this question implies that educators have a shared responsibility for student learning. More than "providing the opportunity", teachers and administrators pursue alternative strategies and interventions without considering failure as an option.

In successful schools, all members of the education community share a sense of responsibility for setting challenging standards and ensuring that all students achieve. The process of setting goals is the result of ongoing communication and collaborative problem solving. Goals are measurable and ongoing assessment provides data for improvement. Professional development is targeted towards achievement of the shared goals for the school and students. The commitment to high goals is also evidenced by the allocation of resources at the building and district levels. On an even deeper level, Michael Fullan notes that a shared sense of "moral purpose" is present among staff and leadership in schools, districts, and even businesses that have successfully implemented improvement efforts.

Suggested readings:

Constantino, S. M. (2003). Engaging All Families: Creating a Positive School Culture by Putting Research into Practice. Lanham, MD: Scarecrow Education.

Corbett, D., Wilson, B., & Williams, B. (2002). Effort and Excellence in Urban Classrooms: Expecting – and Getting – Success with All Students. New York: Teachers College Press.

Corbett, D., Wilson, B., & Williams, B. (2005). No choice but success. Educational Leadership, 62, (6), 8-12.

Deal, T. E. & Peterson, K. D. (1999). Shaping School Culture: The Heart of Leadership. San Francisco, CA: Jossey-Bass Publishers.

Fullan, M. (2001). Leading in a Culture of Change. San Francisco, CA: Jossey-Bass.

Glickman, C. D. (2003). Symbols and celebrations that sustain education. Educational Leadership, 60, (6), 34-38.

Newmann, F. M. (2002). Achieving high-level outcomes for all students: The meaning of staff-shared understanding and commitment. In W. D. Hawley, Ed. The Keys to Effective Schools: Educational Reform as Continuous Improvement. (pp. 28-42). Thousand Oaks, CA: Corwin Press, Inc.

Payne, R. K. (1996). A Framework for Understanding Poverty (3<sup>rd</sup> Ed). Highlands, TX: Aha Process, Inc.

## 2. Open communication and collaborative problem solving

Parents, teachers, administrators, and other school personnel are all part of a successful school community that communicates, sets goals, and solves problems collaboratively. Communication among all members of the school community is open, two-way, non-threatening, and focused on student achievement. Teachers are actively involved in decisions about curriculum, resources, and teaching and learning strategies since they are responsible for implementing these elements in the classroom. Teachers communicate regularly with each other, discussing standards, curriculum, and instructional strategies driven by the challenge to ensure that each student learns. Teachers are involved in decisions both about student learning and about school operations.

A collaborative, problem-solving culture utilizes data from continuous assessment to make informed decisions. Data is used to inform collaboration among teachers as they devise learning strategies to meet individual student needs. The school community works together to remove barriers to student success. Professional development is viewed as one tool in the problem solving arsenal. The depth of commitment to a collaborative problem solving culture is demonstrated through decisions that involve resource allocation to support student learning.

Suggested readings:

Barth, R. S. (1988). School: A community of leaders. In A. Lieberman, Ed. Building a Professional Culture in Schools. (pp. 129-147). New York: Teachers College Press.

Caruso, D. & Salovey, P. (2005). The Emotionally Intelligent Manager. San Francisco, CA: Jossey-Bass.

Devaney, K. & Sykes, G. (1988). Making the case for professionalism. In A. Lieberman, Ed. Building a Professional Culture in Schools. (pp. 3-22). New York: Teachers College Press.

Fullan, M. (2005). Leadership and Sustainability: System Thinkers in Action. Thousand Oaks, CA: Corwin Press.

Heckman, P. E. (1986). Understanding school culture. In J. I. Goodlad (ed.), The Ecology of School Renewal: Eighty-sixth Yearbook of the National Society for the Study of Education (pp. 63-78). Chicago: The University of Chicago Press.

Leadership for Student Learning: Restructuring School District Leadership. (2001). National School Boards Association. Available online at: <http://www.iel.org/programs/21st/reports/district.pdf>

Lieberman, A. & Miller, J. (2004). Teacher Leadership. San Francisco, CA: Jossey-Bass Publishers.

Little, J. W. (2002). Professional communications and collaboration. In W. D. Hawley (ed.) The Keys to Effective Schools: Educational Reform as Continuous Improvement. (pp. 43-55). Thousand Oaks, CA: Corwin Press, Inc.

Moore, N. & Dichter, A. (2000). Building a learning organization. Phi Delta Kappan, 82, (10), 744-747.

Oakley, E. & Krug, D. (1991). Enlightened Leadership: Getting to the Heart of Change. New York: Simon & Schuster

West, B. C. (1994). Perceived leadership among teachers. Ann Arbor, MI: U.M.I. Dissertation Services.

### **3. Continuous assessment for teaching and learning**

Assessment should be used to provide meaningful data, guiding decisions to improve learning for each student. Assessment techniques should be varied, frequently embedded within learning tasks, and be a part of authentic “performance” activities. In addition to assessment within classrooms to inform decisions about individual students, academic programs must be assessed. Data about student learning and overall program outcomes must be part of the content of collaboration among educators.

Meaningful strategies to share assessment results must also be employed in order to engage the community as a partner with the school. As a result of assessment, curriculum and programs should form a coherent scope and sequence that provide appropriate 21<sup>st</sup> century knowledge and skills to each student.

Suggested readings:

Assess 21: A Database of 21<sup>st</sup> Century Skills Assessments. (2004). The Partnership for 21<sup>st</sup> Century Skills. Available online at <http://www.21stcenturyskills.org>.

Baker, E. L. (2002). Teacher use of formal assessment in the classroom. In W. D. Hawley (ed.) The Keys to Effective Schools: Educational Reform as Continuous Improvement. (pp. 56-64). Thousand Oaks, CA: Corwin Press, Inc.

Leithwood, K., Aitken, R., & Jantzi, D. (2001). Making Schools Smarter: A System for Monitoring School and District Progress (2<sup>nd</sup> ed). Thousand Oaks, CA: Corwin Press, Inc.

Popham, W. J. (2001). The Truth About Testing. Alexandria, VA: Association for Supervision and Curriculum Development.

Stiggins, R. (2004). New assessment beliefs for a new school mission. Phi Delta Kappan, 86 (1), 22-27.

Wiggins, G. P. (1993). Assessing Student Performance: Exploring the Purpose and Limits of Testing. San Francisco, CA: Jossey-Bass Publishers.

### **4. Personal and professional learning**

The fourth element – personal and professional learning – is discussed in detail in the “Professional Development” section of this resource.

## 5. Resources to support teaching and learning

Research into school effectiveness supports the notion that “resources” such as a safe and orderly learning environment are a fundamental requirement for successful schools. Facilities that are in good repair, comfortable (e.g. adequately heated or cooled) should be a given. Technology, including phones and access to computers and the internet for both students and teachers, are merely a part of doing business. Support services must be available ensure students are present and ready to learn and that the school environment is conducive to learning.

Beyond these basics, schools require appropriate textbooks, laboratory equipment, library collections, and facilities that fit the instructional activities for which they are used. Class size, particularly in the lower grades, is also a critical factor. While many resource issues must be addressed through appropriate school funding, decisions about allocation of resources at the building and district level must also reflect a commitment to improved student learning.

Suggested readings:

Fullan, M., Bertani, A., & Quinn, J. (2004). New lessons for districtwide reform. Educational Leadership, 61, (7), 42-47.

Johnson, S. M. & Birkeland, S. E. (2003). The schools that teachers choose. Educational Leadership, 60, (8), 20-24.

Key Building Blocks for Student Achievement in the 21<sup>st</sup> Century. (2001). The CEO Forum. Available online at: <http://www.ceoforum.org>.

Leithwood, K. (2002). Organizational conditions to support teaching and learning. In W. D. Hawley (ed.) The Keys to Effective Schools: Educational Reform as Continuous Improvement. Thousand Oaks, CA: Corwin Press, Inc.

Welner, K. G., Weitzman, D. Q. (2005). The soft bigotry of low expenditures. Equity & Excellence in Education, 38, (3), 242-248.

West, B. C. (2003). Building the bridge to effective use of technology. In A. D. Sheekey (ed.) How to Ensure Ed/Tech Is Not Oversold and Underused. Lanham, MD: Scarecrow Press, Inc.

## 6. Curriculum and instruction

A shared commitment to high expectations for all students means that each student experiences a challenging curriculum that provides opportunities for both breadth of topics and in-depth study. The curriculum must also include “learning-how-to-learn” activities to build life-long learning skills. Teaching and learning activities must be varied, targeted to individual student needs, and must be accompanied by appropriate feedback for the student. Learning activities that are perceived as relevant, connected to previous learning, demand active engagement, and provide for a degree of student input are characteristics of environments that develop “21<sup>st</sup> Century Skills.”

Teachers are actively involved in selection of instructional materials and in the design of curriculum. Assessment data and program evaluation are a part of the decision-making about methods, materials, and content. Professional development focuses on both teaching techniques and on deep conceptual understanding of the content of the curriculum. Time for collaboration is one of the resources that is managed to facilitate collaboration and a focus on student learning.

For this section, please review the sections “Improving Student Achievement in Mathematics and “Improving Student Achievement in Reading” in this resource. In addition, several resources not specifically focused on reading and mathematics are provided below.

Suggested readings:

Danielson, C. (1996). Enhancing Professional Practice: A Framework for Teaching. Alexandria, VA: Association for Supervision and Curriculum Development.

Darling-Hammond, L. & Bransford, J. (Eds.) (2005). Preparing Teachers for a Changing World. San Francisco, CA: Jossey-Bass.

Learning for the 21<sup>st</sup> Century. (2003). The Partnership for 21<sup>st</sup> Century Skills. Available online at <http://www.21stcenturyskills.org>.

Schmoker, M. (2004). Tipping Point: From feckless reform to substantive instructional improvement. Phi Delta Kappan, 85, (6). 424-432.

Tomlinson, C. A. (1999). The Differentiated Classroom: Respond to the Needs of All Learners. Alexandria, VA: Association for Supervision and Curriculum Development.

Wiggins, G. & McTighe, J. (1998). Understanding By Design. Alexandria, VA: Association for Supervision and Curriculum Development.

## **Works addressing multiple components of the framework**

Systemic approaches to organizational growth abound in the business literature. Enduring principles have also been applied to schools and school improvement.

Strategies such as the Baldrige approach to use of data and Total Quality Management have been directly transferred and applied in schools. Jim Collins, author of Good to Great (2001), has also been working on the application of the principles of his research to non-profit enterprises such as education.

Recent conferences sponsored by the Kansas State Department of Education have featured the work of Dr. Richard DuFour. He developed the concept of “professional learning communities” through years as a school and district administrator. Schools that succeed in challenging each student to maximize her/his potential are driven by system-wide collaboration that focuses all staff on creating meaningful learning experiences. One tool suggested by Dr. DuFour as a source of data at the systems level is the KEYS 2.0 survey. That tool is also grounded in the six concepts used to organize this resource.

Suggested readings:

An Educators’ Guide to Schoolwide Reform. (1999). Arlington, VA: Educational Research Service.

Barber, M. & Fullan, M. (2005, March). “Tri-level development: It’s the system”. Education Week, 24 (25), pp. 32, 34-35. Available online at [www.michaelfullan.ca](http://www.michaelfullan.ca)

Collins, J. (2001). Good to Great: Why Some Companies Make the Leap... and Others Don’t. New York: HarperCollins Publishers Inc.

Danielson, C. (2002). Enhancing Student Achievement: A Framework for School Improvement. Alexandria, VA: Association for Supervision and Curriculum Development.

Dufour, R. (2004). What is a “Professional Learning Community”? Educational Leadership, 61, (8), 6-11.

DuFour, R., DuFour, R., Eaker, R., & Karhanek, G. (2004). Whatever it Takes: How Professional Learning Communities Respond When Kids Don’t Learn. Bloomington, IN: National Educational Service.

DuFour, R. & Eaker, R. (1998). Professional Learning Communities at Work: Best Practices for Enhancing Student Achievement. Bloomington, IN: National Educational Service.

Fullan, M. (2001). Leading in a Culture of Change. San Francisco, CA: Jossey-Bass Publishers.

Fullan, M. (2004). Learning to lead change: Building system capacity – Core concepts. Publication produced in partnership with Microsoft’s “Partners in Learning” (PiL) Initiative. [www.michaelfullan.ca](http://www.michaelfullan.ca)

Gemberling, Kathryn W., Smith, Carl W., & Villani, Joseph S., The Key Work of School Boards Guidebook (2000). Alexandria, VA: National School Board Association

The Keys to Effective Schools: Educational Reform as Continuous Improvement. (2002). W. D. Hawley, Ed. Thousand Oaks, CA: Corwin Press, Inc.

Keys to Excellence for Schools. <http://www.keysonline.org/>

Marzano, R. J. (2003). What Works in Schools: Translating Research into Action. Alexandria, VA: Association for Supervision and Curriculum Development.

Newmann, F. & Wehlage, G. (1995). Successful School Restructuring. Madison, WI: University of Wisconsin.

Schmoker, M. (2001). The Results Fieldbook: Practical Strategies from Dramatically Improved Schools. Alexandria, VA: Association for Supervision and Curriculum Development.

Senge, P. M. (1990). The Fifth Discipline: The Art and Practice of the Learning Organization. New York: Doubleday.

Spillane, J. P. (2006 – In press). Distributed Leadership. San Francisco, CA: Jossey-Bass.

Togneri, Wendy, & Anderson, Stephen E (2003). Beyond Islands of Excellence: What Districts Can Do to Improve Instruction and Achievement, Alexandria, VA: Association for Curriculum and Staff Development

Williams, B. (2003). Reframing the Reform Agenda. In B. Williams (ed). Closing the Achievement Gap: A Vision for Changing Beliefs and Practices (2<sup>nd</sup> ed). Alexandria, VA: Association for Supervision and Curriculum Development.

Zmuda, A., Kuklis, R., & Kline, E. (2004). Transforming Schools: Creating A Culture of Continuous Improvement. Alexandria, VA: Association for Supervision and Curriculum Development.

Note: This document, “Tools for Quality Practice: A Resource Guide for School Improvement” was developed by the Kansas Learning First Alliance. All seven parts of this resource library are available on the web at [www.teachkansas.org](http://www.teachkansas.org).