Building the Capacity of Schools to Meet Student Needs

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I. Five Essential Ingredients for School Improvement
Organizing Schools for Improvement, 2010 – Bryke, et.al.

1) A coherent instructional guidance system
2) Development of the professional capacity of faculty
3) Strong parent-community-school ties
4) A student-centered learning climate
5) Leadership that drives change
Building Capacity Requires:

- Clear understanding of **student needs**
  - Academic and non-academic needs
- Ability to understand what your **staff needs** to be effective in meeting student needs
- Ability to **identify, access and utilize** resources to meet student needs
- A plan for creating a **culture** that is aligned to your school’s goals
- A plan for engaging your **parents as partners** to reinforce educational goals
Discussion:

- How would you rate your schools on the five essential ingredients of school improvement?
- In which areas does the district need to engage in capacity building work?
- Who are your allies in this work? Where will the district obtain the support needed to sustain the work?
Building school capacity requires an understanding of how to:

- Build partnerships between schools, local government and CBOs in response to:
  - Health and social needs of children – PS 188
  - Extended learning plan aligned to the academic plan - PS 28 Brooklyn, NY;
- Provide professional development for teachers based on student needs – Serving ELLs at Edison Elementary School in Portchester, NY, Multicultural HS
- Ability to implement and modify reforms based upon demonstrated effectiveness
  - Literacy across the curriculum at Brockton HS
Turning around under performing schools: Understanding the difference between technical and adaptive work

- Technical work - A focus on managing the operations of the system, insuring that procedures are working and that employees are in compliance with policy.

- Adaptive work - A focus on the dynamic and complex nature of the work, its substance, meaning and purpose. Work guided by a long term vision, with medium and short term goals. An awareness that we are trying to achieve our goals in a constantly changing environment
  
  – Ron Hiefitz - Leadership on the Line
District support to struggling schools

- Must be able to identify assets and weaknesses
- Must engage in collaborative problem solving
- Must provide access to examples of successful schools and classrooms
- Must model effective and responsive leadership
Draw Lessons From Best Charter Schools

- Develop process for creating new, innovative schools
- Incubate new schools within struggling schools, allow them to grow
- Engage community in new school development process
  - Career academies focused on jobs of the future
  - University sponsored schools
  - Full service schools
Key Adaptive Questions:

- What does it take to educate the children you serve?
  - How do they learn at home?
  - How do they use literacy and math?
  - What are they interested in?
  - How do we engage them?
  - What challenges do they and their parents face?
  - What are their unmet needs that may impact learning?
  - What are their dreams and aspirations?
Creating buy-in, building community

- Shared ownership of the challenges by analyzing data together
- Develop a plan that responds to the data
- Clearly defined roles and responsibilities
- Deliberate and solicit feedback on the plan
- Evaluate the plan regularly to monitor whether or not its working and to maintain quality
PS 28 obtains highest gains in literacy and math in Brooklyn -2012
Adams Scholars 2014
Capacity Building

- Intervene early and effectively in response to academic and social needs
  - Minneapolis 3rd grade drop-out prevention plan

- Personalize the learning environment – PS 12, Academy of Business and Technology, Bronx
  - Use of data systems to monitor performance
  - Implement interventions to meet student needs

- Engage parents in effective partnerships that reinforce child development and learning
  - Partnerships focused on learning needs - McCormick Middle School, Boston
  - Addressing parent needs – Eagle Academy
Building School Capacity

- Teaching and Learning
- Health and Nutrition
- Extended Learning
- Safety, mentors
- Community partners
- Family engagement
Discussion

- In what areas should the district’s capacity building efforts be focused?
- What role will you play in this work? What skills/supports will you need to be effective?
- What will you do to generate buy-in from staff, parents, students and community?
II. Identifying and Responding to Student Needs:
What does it take to educate the children you serve?

- Analyze student achievement data
  – What do the patterns reveal?
- Work with teachers to develop tools for diagnostic assessment
- Talk to parents and students about their needs and interests
- Work with social workers, nurses and CBOs to identify non-academic needs
  – What are the challenges confronting their families and neighborhoods?
Developing Professional Development Strategies in Response to Student Needs

- Achievement data will suggest areas where your staff needs to concentrate
- Conduct regular classroom observations to get a sense of your teachers’ strengths and weaknesses
  - Look for evidence of learning
  - Engage senior teachers in peer mentoring
  - Provide new teachers opportunity to observe effective teachers
- Ask teachers what kinds of training and assistance they need – collaborative problem solving
- Bring teachers together on a regular basis to analyze student work
Teaching and Learning

- We want teachers to see teaching and learning as connected activities: teach the way students learn
  - Use teaching strategies that foster engagement e.g. Socratic seminars, debate, project based learning
  - Focus on evidence of mastery of skills and knowledge – learning occurs through revision
  - Focus on performance – what can our students do?
  - Class time must be on-task work time for students, direct instruction and passive learning kept to a minimum
Culturally Responsive Teaching

• Make expectations and standards explicit by modeling and exposing students to high quality work
• Utilize diagnostic tools to check for understanding
• Awareness that not all students learn in the same ways
  • Utilize different teaching modalities
• Learn about student interests in order to make their lessons culturally relevant
• Draw on cultural resources and frame of reference to enhance motivation and engagement
  • Funds of knowledge, popular culture, oral history, etc.
Obstacles to School Improvement

- School policies and practices are at odds with academic goals
  - Ineffective discipline - over reliance on suspension, failure to address underlying causes of behavior problems, discipline not connected to educational goals and character development
- Inability to utilize your most effective teachers
  - Too many teachers are isolated
- Inability to achieve consensus and “buy-in” among key stakeholders on plan for change
Developing School Culture: Focus on Students

- Create opportunities for students to display leadership at school
- Solicit student ideas for school improvement
  - Provide opportunities for leadership
- Cultivate attitudes and habits that promote academic achievement
  - Confidence and competence
  - Self discipline, self motivation
  - Organizational and study skills
- Implement extra-curricular programs that help in developing these traits: Chess, Robotics, Poetry