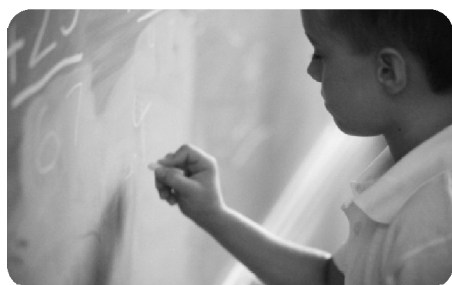


Six Core Practices to Unlock the Potential of All Students

EdgeNotes™



In attempting to explain the achievement gaps that persist despite years of costly reform, researchers often blame implementation. It doesn't matter what curricular, instructional, or assessment resources or systems a school district invests in if these efforts do not translate into effective daily practice in the classroom. Results will be lacking and instructional reform will stall.

So the question remains...how do districts improve the *implementation* of the various factors affecting implementation? We believe the most critical factor is a district's capacity to support each teacher's understanding of three things: a) what should be taught (curriculum), b) when and how to use specific instructional strategies appropriately, and c) how well are students mastering the curriculum.

Teachers need to know precisely what academic skills, concepts, and big ideas to teach and when; how best to introduce those skills and concepts; what students have learned, and what misconceptions/skill deficiencies they may have at any point in time; and how best to resolve those misconceptions while simultaneously extending and enriching the learning of all.

As straightforward as this may seem in theory, putting it into practice can be a complex endeavor. To make the process more understandable and doable, Edgenuity identified six core practices that we believe school districts should have in place to be instructionally effective. Specifically, we believe districts must clearly *align* and *develop* key curricular objectives needed to master the standards; to help teachers effectively *instruct* and *assess* their students; and to help teachers *analyze* the results of student

assessments and *adjust* instructional practices accordingly.

How do these six practices play out in practice?

Align. To make standards operational, it is important for districts not only to identify the essential or "power" standards in each content area, but also to "unpack" those standards into their teachable component skills and concepts. This curriculum framework provides clarity about what teachers are accountable for and also increases curricular coherence across content areas and grade levels. Once the essential skills and concepts have been articulated, they can be sequenced and paced according to the time needed to teach the standard to mastery. Having an accurate and efficient means of measuring progress over time is a critical component of any instructional improvement effort. Therefore, once districts have identified their essential skills and concepts, they need to decide what will be assessed, in what format, and when. More importantly, districts need to analyze the appropriate rigor and cognitive depth required to demonstrate mastery of the standard.

Develop. The curriculum framework and assessment blueprints inform the development of common interim and formative assessments, guide teacher planning, and make it possible to set instructional targets and monitor progress. Lessons and instructional materials especially conducive to student mastery can then be identified or modified and made accessible to teachers. The process of aligning assessments to the curriculum and developing quality materials or resources makes it possible to set instructional targets that are based on what is actually taught.

Instruct. Upon defining and benchmarking their core curriculum, districts must establish processes to support and ensure the delivery of highly effective instruction. This includes reviewing and modifying lessons for mastery instruction and differentiating instruction by content, process, and work product. To determine the effectiveness of instructional strategies, districts must also develop a means for accurately and efficiently observing and self-assessing instructional practice in the classroom.

Assess. After providing initial instruction to students, districts need the capacity to help teachers collect a variety of valid and reliable student assessment data. While this has traditionally meant benchmark testing, it is equally important to develop accurate classroom-based assessment practice among all teachers. This includes grading student assignments and administering tasks for evaluating student performance using rubrics.

Analyze. Once teachers have collected a variety of student assessment and instructional data, districts need to establish well-defined processes for analysis. Given the multiple sources of data, these processes include calibrating multiple measures of mastery to ensure consistency of expectation both across the different measures and among different teachers (i.e. inter-rater reliability). Then they can establish the accuracy of the data to isolate gaps in student skill development and/or conceptual understanding. Finally, the analysis of instructional data leads to evaluating the effectiveness of instructional delivery.

Adjust. Based on the careful analysis of both student performance and instructional delivery, teachers need support in making effective adjustments to instructional practice. Thus, districts must provide scaffolding lessons that are effective in re-teaching skills or concepts that students have not yet mastered and/or enriching or extending the learning of students who have demonstrated mastery. Districts must also have a means of helping schools and teachers target instruction and intervention by appropriately and dynamically grouping and re-grouping students to provide the additional instruction students need to achieve mastery. Given the data about instructional practice, districts should also use this information to support professional development planning based explicitly on the analyses of teacher and student needs.

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While school-level reform has yielded several positive developments by increasing teacher collaboration, establishing common expectations for all students, and using data to guide discussion, it is time for districts to leverage this work and focus their energies on supporting the *implementation* of research-based instructional strategies and effective adjustments of practice. Edgenuity is committed to assist districts in developing their capacities to do just that. With the ongoing shift of accountability to districtwide performance, the urgency for districts to become instructionally focused and effective has never been greater.

EdgeNotes is a free monthly e-mail publication dedicated to providing commentary on making research actionable to improve instruction.

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