



Sample Needs Assessment

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Introduction

About This Report

This final report is the result of a Needs Assessment of Burrell Union Elementary School conducted by HCG. This Needs Assessment was conducted in response to a request from the Superintendent for an external party to conduct a comprehensive needs assessment. The Needs Assessment occurred over three separate days and included an administrator interview, teacher surveys and observations in all classrooms.

About Burrell Union Elementary School

Burrell Union Elementary School is comprised of a kindergarten – 8th grade school, located in [REDACTED]

Needs Assessment at Burrell Union Elementary School

The needs assessment utilized at Burrell examined six topic areas: student engagement, curriculum, instruction, assessment, professional learning and collaboration, and support for transitioning students. Data were collected at the school level through teacher surveys, interviews with the members of the school’s faculty, and classroom observations. From these data HCG prepared a final report for the school’s use.

The remainder of this report presents the key findings that emerged from the process and the actionable recommendations that HCG developed in response. The recommended strategies are those that we believe are most likely to have the greatest positive impact on student achievement at Burrell Union Elementary School. The recommendations should be used to inform the work of the entire school community in order to meet the goals outlined by the school/district/ and school board.

Key Findings

These key findings are detailed in this section. Each key finding statement was crafted based on responses to surveys and interviews.

Key Finding 1

Burrell Union Elementary School does not foster a culture of Collaboration

Key Finding 1 is based on information from surveys of teachers. 85% of surveyed teachers reported that teachers never work together collaboratively to develop plan to address needs around teaching and learning at all levels.

Interview respondents indicated that teachers do use protocols, processes and practices to facilitate professional learning community meetings and PLC time is never used to discuss and coordinate multi-tiered systems of support for students.

Key Finding 2

According to teacher surveys there is some consistency when it comes to Classroom Climate

80 percent of teachers responded that students are enthusiastic about school and have high levels of motivation.

Survey respondents indicated that students are working in small groups, in pairs, and individually on a variety of projects and solving problems.

Key Finding 3

Surveys indicate Teacher Practice: English Language Arts/Literacy/ELD is implemented with varying degrees of success.

Key Finding 3 is supported by data collected from surveys from school staff. In surveys, 60 percent of teachers noted using a balance of literacy and informational text being used, and researched based teaching strategies and learning opportunities in reading comprehension, focused on increasing rigor of complex text were incorporated.

60 percent of survey respondents indicated that ELA/ELD standards were implemented in all lessons and assignments.

Key Finding 4

Surveys indicate a lack of Assessment data is used to inform instruction

Key Finding 4 is supported by surveys. A third of survey respondents indicated Teachers never work collaboratively to analyze data including student work and never develop a plan to address the needs around teaching and learning at all levels.

While 60 percent of teachers agree to sometimes using rubrics as assessments, 10% of respondents always evaluate student work and give feedback.

Classroom Observations

This *Classroom Observation Report* summarizes the findings from observations conducted in your school in May 2015. A single observation cycle consists of a 15- to 20-minute observation session followed by a 7- to 10-minute session during which ratings are recorded. (Ratings are always recorded

immediately following the observation.) The following number of observation cycles was completed for your school:

- English Language Arts: 5 classrooms
- Mathematics: 3 classrooms
- Science: 0 classrooms
- Social Studies: 0 classrooms

The observations were guided by a protocol that has two main sections. The first section is a set of classroom dimensions related to teacher and student interactions in the classroom; these dimensions are included in the Classroom Assessment Scoring System–Secondary (CLASS-S), which is described below. The second section identifies classroom disrupters, also described below.

The observer attended a two-day training on the observation protocol and procedures. To ensure inter-rater reliability, all observers had to pass a reliability test within three weeks of completing the training.

CLASS-S Observation Protocol

The observations were conducted using the CLASS-S Observation Protocol developed by the Center for Advanced Study of Teaching and Learning (CASTL) at the University of Virginia. The CLASS-S protocol includes 11 classroom dimensions related to four domains: emotional support, classroom organization, instructional support, and student engagement. The observations conducted for the Needs Assessment focus on six of the 11 dimensions, selected because of their relationship to student and instructional practices and interactions that challenge and engage students. The following are the six dimensions:

- **Student Engagement.** CLASS-S identifies student engagement that is both active and sustained as an outcome. Student engagement is an important indicator of student learning and

commitment to academic endeavors. Students who are alienated and disengaged from school are much more likely to drop out (Alexander, Entwisle, & Horsey, 1997¹; Rumberger, 2001²).

- **Content Understanding.** Content understanding refers to the depth of lesson content and the approach used to help students comprehend the framework, key ideas, and procedures in an academic discipline. This dimension is associated with the instructional support domain.
- **Analysis and Problem Solving.** This dimension refers to students' use of higher-level thinking skills—in particular, teachers providing opportunities for students to apply higher-order thinking, such as analysis, problem solving, reasoning, and creation. This dimension is associated with the instructional support domain.

- **Quality of Feedback.** This dimension refers to feedback provided to the student, either by the teacher or peers, which expands and extends learning and understanding and encourages student participation in academic discussion and tasks. This dimension is associated with the instructional support domain.
- **Positive Climate.** This dimension is associated with the emotional support domain and refers to the emotional connection and relationships among teachers and students—the warmth, respect, and enjoyment communicated by verbal and nonverbal interactions.
- **Regard for Adolescent Perspectives.** This dimension, also associated with emotional support, refers to teachers meeting and capitalizing on the social and development needs and goals of adolescents through providing opportunities for student leadership and autonomy.

Note: In this report the descriptions of the CLASS-S dimensions are from the CLASS-S manual.

CLASS-S Ratings

The dimensions were coded on a scale of 1 to 7. Briefly, a rating of 1 or 2 indicates that the dimension was never or rarely evident during the observation cycle. For example, a rating of 1 or 2 on *analysis and problem solving* is applied in classrooms where there are little or no opportunities for students to use higher-order thinking skills. A rating of 1 or 2 on *student engagement* indicates that the majority of students were distracted or disengaged throughout the lesson observed.

¹ Alexander, K., Entwisle, D., & Horsey, C. (1997). From first grade forward: Early foundations of high school dropout. *Sociology of Education*, 70(2), 87–107.

² Rumberger, R. W. (2001). *Why students drop out of school and what can be done*. Santa Barbara, CA: University of California–Santa Barbara.

A rating of 3, 4, or 5 indicates that the dimension was evident but not consistently. A rating of 4 on *analysis and problem solving*, for example, indicates that there were some opportunities for students to use higher-order thinking skills, but these opportunities were not consistent or sustained over a long period of time. A classroom rated 3 on a dimension (one point above a low rating) indicates there was less evidence of the dimension than in a classroom rated 5 (one point below a high rating).

A rating of 6 or 7 indicates that the dimension is reflected in all or most classroom activities. A high rating on *regard for adolescent perspectives*, for example, indicates that throughout the classroom, students were consistently provided opportunities to exercise autonomy and leadership, their ideas and opinions were sought, content was connected to adolescent life, and students were given opportunities to interact meaningfully with peers.

Disrupters

The observations also assessed classroom disrupters—the extent to which certain behaviors limit opportunities for meaningful instruction and learning. Each of these was rated as a major disrupter, a minor disrupter, or not a disrupter. The following disrupters were assessed:

- **Student Tardiness.** This disrupter refers to the number and percentage of students who arrived late to the observed class.
- **Student Absenteeism.** Absenteeism refers to the number and percentage of students who were not in class during the observation. (Teachers will be asked how many students should be in the observed class.)
- **Wasted Time/Lost Productivity.** This disrupter refers to time in the classroom that is not associated with instruction and learning. Lost productivity may be the result of not having needed materials, excessive time lost during transitions, teacher disorganization, and so forth.
- **Behavior.** This disrupter refers to student behavior that disrupts teaching and learning, effectiveness of behavior management, and the duration of disruptions during the observation period.
- **Negative Climate.** Negative climate refers to behaviors such as sarcasm, shouting, disrespectful remarks among teachers and/or students, punitive behavior, threats, and so forth. While related to the student behavior indicator described above, this disrupter also considers teacher behaviors and attitudes.
- **External Disruptions.** This disrupter refers to disruptions from external sources, such as hallway noise, announcements, phone calls, and so forth.
- **Students Pulled Out of the Class.** This disrupter refers to the extent to which students are pulled out of the classroom to receive other services. Reasons for pulling students out vary and are sometimes unavoidable; however, a high number of students being pulled out is or may be disruptive to a classroom and to the instruction of the students who are pulled out of class.

In this report, each CLASS-S dimension is defined, and a description of the dimension at a high level (rated 6 or 7) is presented. Following the description is a summary table of the ratings for the school for the dimension and a descriptive narrative. The disrupters are presented in a single table that shows the extent to which the disrupters were major, minor, or not evidenced; the table is followed by a descriptive narrative.

CLASS-S Dimension	Average Classroom Rating at Burrell Union Elementary School (from 1 to 7)		
	Overall	English Language Arts	Mathematics
Regard for adolescent perspectives	Overall	English Language Arts	Mathematics
Content understanding	0.63	1.2	0.06
Analysis and problem solving	2.2	2.4	2
Quality of feedback	1.7	1.4	2
Student engagement	1.3	1.6	1
Positive climate	3.63	3.6	3.66

Dimension 1: Student Engagement (Outcome Measure)

Student engagement is an outcome of instruction and is a major predictor of academic success and graduation from high school. The dimension captures the degree to which all students in the class are focused and participating in the learning activity presented or facilitated by the teacher. According to the CLASS-S manual, **at the high level:**

- Most students are actively engaged in classroom discussions and activities.
- High engagement is sustained throughout different activities and lessons.

Summary Table	Classrooms Observed	Low Range (1–2)		Mid Range (3–5)		High Range (6–7)		Average Rating
		N	%	N	%	N	%	
	ELA (N =5)	1	20%%	4	80%	0	-	3.6
	Mathematics (N = 3)	1	33%	2	66%	0	-	3.66
	Science/Social Studies (N = 0)	0	-	0	-	0	-	-
	Total (N = 8)	2	-	6	-	0	-	3.63
Summary Narrative	<p>Overall for this dimension, students were moderately engaged in classroom discussion and activities. Student appeared to be listening but are not taking an active role by responding to questions or by asking their own questions. Students periodically give responses to teacher questions and my volunteer information but they are in a receptive rather than active mode.</p>							
	<p>Overall, most students appear to be on task and to be doing what they are told, but they do not really appear interested in the task.</p>							

Dimension 2: Content Understanding (Instructional Support)

Content understanding refers to both the depth and lesson content and the approach used to help students comprehend the framework, key ideas, and procedures in an academic discipline. At a high level, content understanding refers to interactions among the teacher and students that lead to an integrated understanding of the facts, skills, concepts, and principles. According to the CLASS-S manual, **at the high level:**

- The focus of the class is on encouraging a deep understanding of content through meaningful, interactive discussion, explanation of broad, organizing ideas and relevant procedural practice.
- Class discussion and materials consistently and effectively communicate the essential attributes and examples of concepts/procedures.
- New concepts/broad ideas are consistently linked to students' prior knowledge in ways that advance understanding and clarify misconceptions.
- Content/procedural knowledge is effectively and accurately communicated to students.

Summary Table	Classrooms Observed	Low Range (1–2)		Mid Range (3–5)		High Range (6–7)		Average Rating
		<i>N</i>	%	<i>N</i>	%	<i>N</i>	%	
	ELA (<i>N</i> =5)	4	80%	1	20%	0	-	2.4
	Mathematics (<i>N</i> =3)	2	66%	1	33%	0	-	2
	Science/Social Studies (<i>N</i> =0)	0	-	0	-	0	-	-
	Total (<i>N</i> =8)	6	-	2	-	0	-	2.2

Summary Narrative

The teacher makes few or no attempts to develop or broaden student understanding of concepts, either by linking facts with concepts or by discussing the big ideas within a discipline. The emphasis is not on the meaningful relationships among facts, concepts, and generalizations; instead it is primarily on discrete bits of information and facts that students are expected to remember and recall. Activities and instruction seem very abstract and removed from students' everyday lives, and the teacher does not help students apply their thinking to real world events and situations.

The teacher gives no attention to student's prior knowledge; s/he does not try to identify students already know about a subject in order to make links between the new material and what is known. Content is presented independent of students' understandings and previous knowledge.

The teachers' knowledge of subject matter appears limited and insufficient in order to support student learning.

Dimension 3: Analysis and Problem Solving (Instructional Support)

Analysis and problem solving refers to the degree to which the teacher facilitates students' use of higher-level thinking skills, such as analysis, problem solving, reasoning, and creation, through the application of knowledge and skills. Opportunities for the teacher and students to demonstrate metacognition (thinking about thinking and learning as well as planning) also are included. According to the CLASS-S manual, **at the high level:**

- The teacher consistently promotes students' use of higher-level thinking, such as analysis, creation, and evaluation.
- The teacher consistently provides complex tasks for students to problem solve.
- The teacher regularly models, encourages, and provides strategic opportunities for students to develop thinking, self-evaluation, and planning skills.

Summary Table	Classrooms Observed	Low Range (1–2)		Mid Range (3–5)		High Range (6–7)		Average Rating
		<i>N</i>	%	<i>N</i>	%	<i>N</i>	%	
	ELA (<i>N</i> = 5)	5	100%	0	-	0	-	1.4
	Mathematics (<i>N</i> = 3)	2	66%	1	33%	0	-	2
	Science/Social Studies (<i>N</i> = 0)	0	-	0	-	0	-	-
	Total (<i>N</i> = 8)	7	-	1	-	0	-	1.7

Summary Narrative	<p>The teacher does not provide opportunities for students to use higher-order thinking. The teacher does not provide challenging questions and/or activities that require students to apply their knowledge and skills using analysis, synthesis/creation or evaluation. The teacher does not present activities providing opportunities for inference, critical thinking, and creativity. The teacher is focused on student's ability to recall facts and relies on questions have one correct answer.</p> <p>The teacher limits the time given to wrestle independently with questions and activities and is more focused on correctness and completion. Students are not encouraged or invited to explore independent avenues of inquiry.</p>
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Dimension 4: Quality of Feedback (Instructional Support)

Quality of feedback assesses the degree to which teachers respond to students and provide feedback that expands and extends learning and understanding and encourages student participation. Significant feedback also may be provided by peers. According to the CLASS-S manual, **at the high level:**

- There are frequent feedback loops between the teacher and students or among students, which lead students to a deeper understanding of material and concepts.
- Students often are prompted to explain their thinking and rationale for responses and actions.
- The teacher and/or peers often scaffold student learning, allowing students to perform at a higher level than they would independently.
- The teacher and/or peers often provide additional information to expand students' understanding.
- The teacher and other students often encourage students' efforts intended to increase involvement and persistence.

Summary Table	Classrooms Observed	Low Range (1–2)		Mid Range (3–5)		High Range (6–7)		Average Rating
		<i>N</i>	%	<i>N</i>	%	<i>N</i>	%	
	ELA (<i>N</i> = 5)	5	100%	0	-	0	-	1.6
	Mathematics (<i>N</i> = 3)	3	100%	0	-	0	-	1
	Science/Social Studies (<i>N</i> = 0)	0	-	0	-	0	-	-
	Total (<i>N</i> = 8)	8	-	0	-	0	-	1.3

Summary Narrative

Feedback in the classrooms is non-existent or perfunctory. Rather than engage students in back and forth exchanges which serve to expand and extend their learning, teachers give perfunctory comments or no feedback about students; ideas or work. Peer feedback is absent. Teachers do not focus on pushing students to deeper levels of understanding. Teachers and students are not persistent in their feedback, and ask few or no follow up questions that would facilitate a deeper understanding of the content.

Students are rarely, if ever, prompted to explain their thinking and rationale for responses and actions.

Teachers and/or students rarely, if ever, scaffold students learning. Teachers and students rarely provide assistance or hints that would help them perform academic tasks or refine their thinking. If a student is struggling to get an answer, the teacher simply moves on and gives the correct answer or asks another student.

Dimension 5: Positive Climate (Emotional Support)

Positive climate reflects the emotional connection and relationships among teachers and students and the warmth, respect, and enjoyment communicated by verbal and nonverbal interactions. According to the CLASS-S manual, **at the high level:**

- There are many indications that the teacher and students enjoy warm, supportive, and respectful relationships with one another.
- There are frequent displays of positive affect among the teacher and students.
- There are frequent positive communications among the teacher and students.
- The teacher and students consistently demonstrate respect for one another.

Summary Table	Classrooms Observed	Low Range (1–2)		Mid Range (3–5)		High Range (6–7)		Average Rating
		<i>N</i>	%	<i>N</i>	%	<i>N</i>	%	
		ELA (<i>N</i> = 5)	0	-	4	80%	1	
Mathematics (<i>N</i> = 3)	2	66%	1	33%	0	-	1.66	
Science/Social Studies (<i>N</i> = 0)	0	-	0	-	0	-	-	
Total (<i>N</i> = 8)	2		5		1		3.03	

Summary Narrative
<p>There are some indications that the teachers and students enjoy warm, supportive and respectful relationships with one another. There are times when the students appear to enjoy spending time together and appear comfortable with physical proximity to one another. There is evidence that students seek out opportunities to interact with each other when opportunities arise. Teachers sometimes respond to students’ efforts and participation in activities and lessons with positive comments (“good job”, “awesome”).</p> <p>There are times when teachers and students use respectful language (“please”, “excuse me”, “thank you”) and refer to one another by name.</p>

Dimension 6: Regard for Adolescent Perspectives (Emotional Support)

The dimension focuses on the teachers meeting and capitalizing on the social and developmental needs and goals of adolescents by providing opportunities for student autonomy and leadership. Also considered are the extent to which student ideas and opinions are valued and content is made useful and relevant to adolescents. According to the CLASS-S manual, **at the high level:**

- The teacher consistently provides support for student autonomy and leadership by offering meaningful student choice, responsibilities, and/or leadership.
- The teacher consistently frames material to make connections to the current experiences of adolescents.
- The teacher consistently uses and encourages the sharing of student ideas and opinions and flexibly follows and responds to student comments.
- The teacher promotes opportunities for peer-to-peer interactions that are meaningful and serve an integral role within the lesson.
- The teacher provides student freedom of movement and placement during instruction.

Summary Table	Classrooms Observed	Low Range (1–2)		Mid Range (3–5)		High Range (6–7)		Average Rating
		N	%	N	%	N	%	
	ELA (N = 2)	1	50%	1	50%	0	-	1.2
	Mathematics (N = 1)	1	100%	0	-	0	-	0.066
	Science/Social Studies (N = 0)	0	-	0	-	0	-	-
	Total (N = 3)	2	-	1	-	0	-	0.633

Summary Narrative

The teacher provides all the structure for the class with no chance for student choice, responsibilities, decision-making and/or leadership. Activities, instruction and interactions in the classes are teacher driven. Teachers rarely provide opportunities within the lesson for students to assert their autonomy. Students rarely have choices within assignments and must complete tasks in a prescribed way.

Teachers present material with no effort to make connections to the current experiences of adolescents and do not make salient how or why the material is of value. Teachers do not use or encourage the sharing of student ideas and opinions and do not follow and respond to flexibility to student comments.

Teachers do not encourage peer-to-peer interactions that are meaningful within the context of the lesson.

Classroom Disrupters

Class disrupters refer to activities and events that take away from instructional time and from teacher and student focus on instruction and learning. The following potential disrupters are assessed as to whether they were major, minor, or not evidenced in the observed classroom.

- Student tardiness: the number of students who are and are not tardy in the observed class.
- Absenteeism: the number and proportion of students who are absent at the time of the observation.
- Behavior: the extent to which behavior disrupted instruction, the effectiveness of behavior management, and the duration of behavioral disruption.
- External disruption: the extent to which noise, announcements, phone calls, etc., disrupt instruction.
- Students pulled out of the class: the number of students pulled out of the observed classroom to receive other services.

The table shows the number of classrooms in which each of these potential disrupters was coded as major, minor, or not evidenced.

Summary Table	Classrooms Observed (<i>N</i> = 8)	Major Disrupter		Minor Disrupter		Not a Disrupter	
		<i>N</i>	%	<i>N</i>	%	<i>N</i>	%
	Tardiness					1	
	Absenteeism						
	Wasted Time/Lost Productivity						
	Behavior						
	Negative Climate						
	External Disruptions			7			
	Students Pulled Out of Class			3			
Summary Narrative	<p>In one classroom, a student was one minute late to class. This was not a factor in instruction at all. Another classroom experienced a student who became ill. Student was allowed to leave classroom and was escorted to office by another classmate. Both left and returned without major disruption to instruction.</p> <p>In four classrooms, either a teacher cell phone or the classroom phone rang. Three out of the four calls were ignored. In the instance where the teacher took the call, a student was being called to the main office.</p> <p>In two classrooms, the school bell rang but was ignored by students and teachers.</p>						

Recommendations

Overview of Recommendations

The Needs Assessment process can help Burrell Union Elementary School gain a clear picture of its current conditions and provides areas of focus with recommendations. These recommendations were chosen because of their potential to help all school staff concentrate on the issues that, if improved, will quickly and positively impact the turnaround of the school learning community.

These recommendations are discussed on the following pages. Each recommendation provides a review of research, specific actions the school should take during its implementation process, examples of real schools that have successfully implemented strategies, and resources and tools for additional information. All works cited appear in the References section at the end of this report.

Please note that the order in which these recommendations are presented does not reflect a ranking or prioritization of the recommendations.

Recommendation 1:

Establish leadership structures and processes focused on transparent communications to build trust and support for the school/district Local Control Accountability Plan/SPSA.

Link to Findings

According to interviews and surveys there is a lack of trust, open communication and a desire for shared decision-making. This coupled with the current need to transform Burrell Union Elementary School from a historically low-achieving school to a high achieving school with new staff and student population signals the need for visionary leadership with the skills and capacity to manage the change process.

Link to Research

Leadership and Trust

In a six-year examination of the links between leadership practices and student achievement Wahlstrom, Seashore Louis, Leithwood, & Anderson (2010) find that trusting relationships between school principals and teachers and amongst teachers are have a bearing on improved outcomes for students. “High-trust schools exhibited more collective decision making, with a greater likelihood that reform initiatives were widespread, and with demonstrated improvements in student learning (Wahlstrom, et al., p.41) Trusting relationships amongst staff are especially critical when a school community is undergoing significant changes. “People who are experiencing fear and anxiety about their capacity to manage change require leaders they can trust, as well as leaders who are empathetic and socially skilled (Wahlstrom, et al., p.168). School leaders may foster trusting relationships with staff through supportive behaviors, transparent communications, clearly articulated roles, expectations, and goals.

Leadership for Dramatic School Improvement

Herman and colleagues (2008) suggest that school leadership is a “key part of school change” (p. 10) and that principals must effectively communicate the need for dramatic changes and demonstrate a clear

commitment to those changes by following through on them with urgency. In addition to basic strong leadership practices, when working to evoke dramatic school improvement individual school leaders must possess a unique set of turnaround skills, including data-driven decision-making, visioning, problem solving, and driving for results (Steiner, L., & Hassel, E. A., 2011).

Communication Plan and Structures

Engaging stakeholders is a key step in designing and implementing successful education reforms, particularly those focused on improving a school which necessitates creating a sense of urgency, rallying everyone around a common mission that results in dramatic change. Stakeholders are more likely to support efforts that are transparent and understandable. Therefore, effective communication is essential at all stages of any education reform—conceptualization, design, implementation, and program evaluation. Reform leaders should have a plan in place for establishing stakeholder buy-in; soliciting stakeholder feedback; building stakeholder knowledge; supporting stakeholders during implementation; and sharing implementation success stories, lessons learned, and next steps.

A high-quality communication plan is critical because it:

- Ensures a common vision among stakeholders.
- Provides a focus for engagement and communication efforts.
- Clarifies objectives and target audiences.
- Introduces an accurate understanding of how the system works.
- Builds support for the new system, which is crucial for sustainability.

Implementation Considerations

Creating a Communications Plan

Step 1. Define Communication Goals

An effective communication strategy is based on clearly articulated goals of the SPSA/LCAP. When beginning the discussion of what to communicate, consider the following three questions:

- *What are the goals and components of the SPSA/LCAP that need to be communicated?* Defining the goals and components of the SPSA/LCAP focuses the reform effort on a desired outcome. Furthermore, in developing the communication plan, it is important to articulate the goals and components of the SPSA/LCAP in a consistent manner to all stakeholder groups to avoid confusion, mixed messages, and the spread of false information.
- *What are the goals and priorities of the communication plan?* When determining the goals of the communication plan, consider what outcomes you would like to accomplish with the communication plan (e.g., build support, disseminate information). Take this moment to prioritize what is important when developing and implementing a communication strategy.
- *How will you measure if you have achieved the goals of the communication plan?* It is important to have measures to track your progress in achieving your communication plan goals. Equally important is to have checkpoints that indicate you are on-track to reaching your goals in a timely manner. In essence, checkpoints are measurable, short-terms goals that specify a timeframe in which you plan to achieve a specific amount of the larger goal.

Step 2: Develop a Communication Plan

Developing communication strategies for each group of stakeholders is important for building support, maintaining awareness, and reinforcing key messages and desired behaviors. When discussing how to develop a communication plan, consider the following four questions.

- *What are the communication objectives for each stakeholder group? How will these objectives be achieved?* Communication objectives will vary by stakeholder group, so it is important to discuss each stakeholder group individually. Discussing how objectives will be achieved is crucial to writing out the communication plan and implementing it. Given the number of stakeholder groups, the School Leadership Team should consider breaking out the work for this step into small committee subgroups. Consider these questions:
 - What activities (e.g., professional development, information sessions) are important to achieving the communication objectives for each group?
 - Are there potential barriers (e.g., language, experience) to achieving these objectives?
 - What tactics can be used to overcome these barriers?
 - What concerns should be considered for each group?
- *What messages should be communicated to each stakeholder group?* When communicating with each stakeholder group, it is important to recall the critical issues that concern the group. Be sure that the messages about the SPSA/LCAP address these concerns while also communicating the goals and components of the school turnaround plan.
- *What are the best channels of communication with each stakeholder group?* When deciding which channel(s) to use to communicate with each group, consider the benefits and disadvantages of each communication channel.
- *How will you gather feedback from each stakeholder group to inform the SPSA/LCAP?* A mechanism for gathering feedback from stakeholder groups will help build support for the SPSA/LCAP and lead to better implementation. When thinking about gathering feedback, consider what additional channels can be used by stakeholders to provide feedback and what resources are available to address critical feedback.

Step 3: Implement the Communication Plan Effectively

Successful implementation of the communication plan is crucial to its effectiveness. When planning for effective implementation of the communication plan, discuss the following questions with the leadership team:

- *What tasks need to be completed to carry out each component of the communication plan? Who is responsible for each task? What is the timeline for each task?* Develop a comprehensive set of critical milestones (i.e., important deadlines) for successful implementation and sustained progress. Quick wins (visible improvements early in the turnaround process) can rally staff around the effort and overcome resistance and inertia (Kowal and Hassel, 2005). Certain outcomes that matter to the school can result from changes made quickly at the administrative

level without needing teacher buy-in or approval from the district. Although these initial changes may not improve student achievement immediately, they can set the tone for change. A short-term focus on quick wins can establish a climate for long-term change (Picucci et al, 2002b). Transparent milestones will help the entire organization know the current state of implementation and will hold teams accountable for their work. Major milestones also are potential opportunities to report to the broader public, including advisory committees, the news media, and other audiences.

- *What are the potential roadblocks to implementing the communication plan and solutions to overcome the roadblocks?* Identifying potential roadblocks in the communication plan while laying out the project timeline enables the School Leadership Team to incorporate solutions to overcome these roadblocks into the project timeline. Identifying and assessing problems and barriers correctly is a task that can be more difficult than it sounds. For example, members of the School Leadership Team who are responsible for communicating professional development initiatives have not been communicating the agreed upon talking points to their respective constituents. After some investigation by the administrator, reasons for the lack of communication was some members of the school leadership team did not completely understand the components and outcomes of the professional development thus they did not feel confident in communicating it to their peers for fear of questions they would not be able to answer. Barriers may have one or more obvious sources, but the root cause must be uncovered to solve the problem.
- *What are important budget considerations for implementing the communication plan?* The parameters of the communication budget are important to consider because they affect the number and type of implementation activities as well as the channels of communication used. Failing to consider the budget will lead to a less effective communication plan and implementation. Be sure to keep the budget in mind when deciding which tasks to include in the project timeline.

Step 4: Evaluate the Communication Plan on an Ongoing Basis

Evaluating the effectiveness of the communication plan is necessary to measure progress in reaching the goals of the reform effort and also in adapting the communication plan to meet the changing needs and perceptions of the audience. Use the communication goals, measures, and checkpoints established in Step 1 and the communication objectives and messages documented in Step 2 to assess the effectiveness of communication. When deciding how to evaluate the communication plan and its implementation consider the following questions:

- *Was the goal of the communication plan achieved? If not, why not? Did you assess the effectiveness of the communication plan by gathering information from all stakeholders? Were the communication objectives for each stakeholder group achieved? What messages worked well with their target audience? What messages need to be changed or delivered differently in the future? Why?* Reflect back on the communication objectives and key messages to be communicated for each stakeholder group in Step 2. Use an appropriate method (e.g., survey, focus groups) to assess if the communication objectives were achieved or not, what messages worked well (i.e., resonated with the stakeholder group or helped achieve the objectives), which messages need to be refined, and how those messages should be refined.
- *What actionable feedback was received about the school turnaround plan? About the communication strategy? How will this feedback be incorporated in to the school turnaround or*

communication plan? Soliciting feedback is an important part of any improvement approach. Just as important is deciding which feedback is constructive and actionable and incorporating that feedback into the revised system or plan. Such incorporation helps build stakeholder support by making stakeholders feel that they are being heard and have ownership of the system.

- *How do you ensure that the communication plan is effective?* An effective leadership team will regularly review the strategies of the communication plan.

Organizing for Change

A 2006 report by Ronald H. Heck and Rochelle Mahoe published in the "American Journal of Education" indicated that the organizational structure of a school might significantly influence the success of the school's students. The study pointed out that factors like discipline, challenging curriculum, and tracking and teacher performance depend on the school's organizational structure and can influence student success.

Implementation Considerations

To support efforts at Burrell Union Elementary School, two key structures will help clarify roles, foster transparency and communication, engender trust, and foster the development of shared decision-making:

1. Establish an Instructional Leadership Team
2. Organize school-wide professional learning communities

1. Establish an Instructional Leadership Team. Principals cannot lead the school to make breakthrough achievement gains on their own: the support of an Instructional Leadership Team (ILT) is crucial. Depending on the strengths and the job design of the individuals in the school, the instructional leadership team may include teacher leaders and instructional coaches. Leadership team members are responsible for implementing school-wide initiatives for instruction, and they also model cultural norms. So, it's imperative that the members of the leadership team share the principal's vision for the school.

The ILT is charged with examining student data, asking probing questions to get to root causes, addressing these root causes through specific action items, and implementing and monitoring action items to improve instruction, and by extension, student achievement. In order to effectively accomplish this goal, the ILT is ultimately responsible for creating a data based and results oriented performance culture in its school.

Transparency and collaboration are hallmarks of this data-based culture. By engaging in productive, and sometimes difficult conversations and systematically sharing both the content of these conversations as well as their resulting difficulties and successes with all members of their school community, the ILT

maintains the focus of all stakeholders on the essential questions: "What have the students learned?" and "How do we know?"

The ILT meets monthly to drive the process of continuous improvement of the academic outcomes of all students at their school by:

- Reviewing school wide student outcomes

- Defining key instructional and learning challenges
- Diagnosing root causes or challenges
- Developing and implementing action plans across the school (i.e. across all Teacher Teams) to address key issues
- Monitoring and assessing results of action plans
(Chicago Public Schools, 2012, p.3).

The term *instructional leadership* is often used to refer to leadership practices that establish a climate and a culture of continuous professional learning as well as actions taken by principals to engage teachers in their own personal professional growth (Wahlstrom et al., 2010). “School leader[s] should spend considerable time getting to know teachers and their individual skills, personality, knowledge, background, and goals. Getting to know teachers also involves spending time in their classrooms. The school leader can then use this information to place a teacher in a classroom that better “fits” both the teacher and the students” (IES Practice Guide, p.28)

2. Organize school-wide professional learning communities. “Professional development to help staff reach the school’s goals is an essential element of all school reform efforts and should be part of turnaround schools” (IES Practice Guide, p.27) One trademark of high-performing schools is what is known as a professional learning community. A professional learning community is characterized as a group of educators who “work together to analyze and improve their classroom practice...engaging in an ongoing cycle of questions that promote deep team learning” (DuFour, 2004).

School-wide professional learning structures—such as professional learning communities provides structures and processes to deepen administrator and teacher knowledge and skill level. Each PLC (Grade Level or Subject Team) determines an instructional focus based on a review of student achievement data and other information aligned to the school improvement goals. Teams are led by a facilitator with other members of the team assigned roles such as note taker. The staff (including ancillary and support) should be trained in the PLC process to include determining of member’s roles and responsibilities. Teams should have regular sanctioned time to meet that is protected with other school meetings scheduled around PLC meeting times. The meeting schedule should be published at the beginning of the school year – preferably presented during staff preparations days prior to school opening in the fall. Set meeting locations and times that should be non-negotiable. It is suggested to locate all meetings in the library (easy access for administrators to attend to provide support) and to ensure meetings are in fact happening.

At the school level, the Instructional Leadership Team (ILT) and Professional Learning Communities (PLC) work in concert to meet the needs of all students in a deliberate and impactful manner.



Quick Links: Online Resources for Further Information

Meeting Protocols

School Reform Initiative (http://schoolreforminitiative.org/protocol/a_z.html)

National School Reform Faculty (http://www.nsrffharmony.org/protocol/a_z.html)

Professional Learning Communities

Annenberg Institute for School Reform. Professional learning communities: Professional development strategies that improve instruction. <http://www.annenberginstitute.org/pdf/proflearning.pdf>

Rick DuFour, What is a “professional learning community”?

http://pdonline.ascd.org/pd_online/secondary_reading/el200405_dufour.html

Hamilton, L., Halverson, R., Jackson, S., Mandinach, E., Supovitz, J., & Wayman, J. Using student achievement data to support instructional decision making.

http://ies.ed.gov/ncee/wwc/pdf/practiceguides/dddm_pg_092909.pdf

Recommendation 2:

Implement structures, supports and processes for the collaborative development and implementation of a school-wide standards-based curriculum and a shared framework for high-quality, rigorous instruction.

Based on information from interviews, surveys of teachers and classroom observations. There is limited evidence to support the use of standards in curriculum maps, lesson or unit plans.

Research shows that the strength of successful districts [and schools] lies in a consistent alignment of state standards to the curriculum and assessments. In addition, these districts [and schools] share their vision and philosophy, and they aim to align their achievement efforts with their vision. In this way, they are creating coherence for long-term sustainability of improvement efforts (Center for Comprehensive School Reform and Improvement, 2009a, 2009b).

As a school engages in school improvement efforts, school leaders and staff must work together to create coherent, purposeful and sustainable learning environments for all students and staff. At the high school level, this includes:

Developing a shared vision at school and grade levels

Monitoring progress in alignment of curriculum, instruction and assessment

Promoting a culture of continuous improvement in teaching and learning at the school and department levels.

“While a vision statement reflects agreements about what the school should be, from this big picture perspective should come a level of specificity that allows for focus on changes required in the structure of the curriculum and instructional practices” (Kelly, 2010)

Structures that support a Shared Vision of teaching and learning

To achieve a shared vision, there must be structures and processes in place for each member of the school community to collaboratively engage in building collective understanding and commitment to the vision and begin the work of shifting from a focus on teaching to a focus on learning (DuFour, 2004). This includes ongoing and collective exploration of the following:

What students are expected to learn; and

A systematic process in which teachers work together to analyze and improve their classroom practice

Research shows that collaboration between teachers can be a powerful tool as a driver for school improvement by providing “opportunities for adults across a school system to learn and think together about how to improve their practice in ways that lead to improved student achievement” (Annenberg Institute for School Reform, 2004, p.2). Schmoker (1996) recommends that teams of teachers implement, assess, and adjust instruction in short-term cycles of improvement—not annually, but continuously. Common team tasks include intensive efforts to align content taught across grades, and development of interim and diagnostic mini-assessments to monitor student progress on a continuing basis. Practices such as the development of agendas and minutes and the use of organized procedures for meetings help the teams stay focused and maintain a history of team work.

Curriculum

As identified in Marzano’s (2003) meta-analysis, a guaranteed and viable curriculum is the most important school-level factor impacting student achievement. Marzano’s concept of a *guaranteed and viable* curriculum is related to the extent to which a school:

Provides the opportunity for every student to learn a core curriculum

Provides adequate time for teachers to teach the content

Ensures that the articulated curriculum content for any course, any grade level can be adequately addressed in the time available

A curriculum is a school’s written guide for what students should know, understand, and be able to do as a result of instruction and for how content is sequenced over time. Strategies for school improvement must focus on the particular academic needs of students. If curriculum materials are to facilitate reform they must also provide teachers with a guide for what students need to learn. High-quality curriculum frameworks guide teachers in the planning and implementation of classroom instruction. Revised curriculum materials must address students’ content and process understanding in a variety of classroom settings.

Curriculum mapping is a strategy that has proven useful for helping teachers engage in the alignment process (Kallick & Colosimo, 2009). Curricula must align with standards, within subject areas and across grade levels so that the students’ experiences are cumulative, coordinated, and support subsequent student learning. Consistency in wording, format and intra-alignment contribute significantly to the quality and clarity regarding accurate curriculum map data interpretation throughout a learning organization (Hale, p. 39).

Instructional Practice

Instruction refers to methods of teaching as well as the learning activities used to help students master the content and objectives specified by a curriculum. The effects of the quality of teaching on student achievement are well documented. Research suggests that the benefit of improving the quality of classroom instruction has a greater impact than other policy interventions, such as lowering class size. “The teaching effectiveness research has shown that positive teacher behaviors produce positive student outcomes” (Martinez & Martinez, 1999).

To ensure quality instruction -in every classroom and for all students- is the focus of school-wide and systemic school improvement efforts. Schools must define quality instructional practices and come to a

shared understanding. “Adopting a broad but common framework for classroom instructional design and planning, using common instructional language and consistently using research-based instructional strategies in each class are the hallmarks of high-performing school districts” (McREL, 2006).

A common language/model of instruction provides a framework for a way to talk about instruction that is shared by everyone in a district or school level. “Principals and teachers should be able to use a common language of instruction to converse about effective teaching, give and receive feedback, collect and act upon data to monitor growth regarding the reasoned use of the strategies identified in the framework, and align professional development needs against the framework” (Marzano, 2010). Using a research-based set of standard teaching practices, as a basis for observation and discussion, will add a concrete, results-based focus to discourse across the school community (Danielson, 1996; Spitz, 2001).

To create and monitor a shared vision for teaching and learning at Burrell Union Elementary School, three key activities will help enact a common understanding of:

1. Opportunities and structures for ongoing professional collaboration
2. Curriculum mapping and alignment
3. Improvement of instructional practice

Effective Structures for creating and sustaining a shared vision

Provide sufficient time for teachers to discuss student learning needs and share, review, and provide feedback on instructional practices that address student learning needs. Embed these opportunities into the school’s instructional calendar, including weekly common planning periods for each team and other opportunities throughout the school year for extended time to dedicate to collaboration time (e.g. in-service days, grade level assemblies, back-to-back periods of “electives”).

Structure time with clearly mapped goals, objectives, supports and accountability. Create a long term plan, calendar, and/or schedule of topics and activities for common planning time.

Identify member of leadership team to provide resources, training and support to teams and hold them accountable for objectives and outcomes.

Identify external experts who can facilitate group work.

Use of protocols to create an effective and efficient process for collaboration. The use of a discussion (or any other) protocol can help structure conversations by specifying how time will be allotted to achieve certain goals such as presenting context, asking clarifying questions, providing and reflecting on feedback, brainstorming, or decision-making,

Align the priorities and work of teams with school improvement goals and priorities. Including the following identified by Chicago Public Schools (2006):

Setting common achievement goals and analyzing student work and assessment data to determine root cause of student performance.

Identify and support with data key student learning challenges;

Develop improvement strategies to address student learning challenges; Improving instructional practice by developing clear next steps (action items) that address the instructional core, and by tracking the impact of changes to instruction on student achievement.

Utilizing artifacts such as team norms, member responsibilities, standards-alignment documentation, goal sheets, action plans, and action plan monitoring procedures,” and

Monitor and assess improvement efforts.

Use data to drive instructional change at the classroom and school level. Data about teachers’ instructional practices can help determine the fidelity of implementation in instructional programs and can supply information about professional development and priorities.

Enacting Vision through Curriculum

Provide clear instructional leadership and accountability. Define the model for learning: curriculum, scope & sequence and schedule for learning for the core subjects of reading, writing and Mathematics. Provide regular, sanctioned time for teams of teachers, specialists, and administrators to review the maps and to identify gaps and overlaps in coverage across grade levels and within subject areas. Share and discuss findings with all teacher teams.

Determine a timeline for immediate revisions as well as a timeline to address issues that need additional time for planning and research.

Revise curricular documents through mapping and alignment. Curricular documents should include strategies, modification and adaptations to ensure that all students have an opportunity to be successful in the given curriculum.

Identify structures and supports needed to frequently and regularly monitor the implementation of the curriculum within the school (e.g. Timeline and schedule, persons responsible, observation and walk-through protocols, district specialists, etc.)

Plan for the use of monitoring data to reflect on and evaluate the effectiveness of the curriculum (classroom observation data, lesson plan review, student achievement results on common formative assessments). Intersperse times for teams to reflect on data throughout the year.

Coordinate Curriculum with Instructional Practice

Identify and analyze available frameworks and essential instructional practices.

Select and adapt frameworks for use throughout the school.

Sanctioned time for frequent and regular conversations with teachers, administrators and instructional support staff. This time is dedicated to “unpacking”, modeling, practicing and planning for the use of instructional practice.

Provide job-embedded instructional development and support that provides teachers with sustained opportunities to improve instructional practice, and in turn student achievement. Professional development should parallel the school improvement plan and evidence of research-based practices in the classroom as determined by systematic classroom observations by the principal and other instructional leaders.

Monitor instructional practice with cycle of frequent observations of practice, data-based debrief conversations, and planning for improvement of practice. Align classroom observations with professional development.

Doing What Works: Examples from Real Schools—Stoneybrook Middle School

Stoneybrook Middle School is located on the East Coast. The school has had success in developing consensus maps.

The process to ensure that a rigorous, relevant, and aligned curriculum is fully articulated and understood by teachers can take many forms. Still, some common steps and practices characterize successful efforts. Stoneybrook Middle School is an urban school on the East Coast serving a population of students that is 65 percent African American, 32 percent white, and about 2 percent Asian American and Native American. Nearly 80 percent qualify for free or reduced-price lunch. After a school-based team analyzed achievement trends from annual and benchmark assessments and analyzed previously developed diary maps, what emerged was a realization that there were gaps in the curriculum at certain grade levels and a lack of rigor in some areas. Because teachers at Stoneybrook and other district schools had previously engaged in diary mapping, it was decided that it was time to take the effort to the next logical step of developing consensus maps. The renewed

curriculum initiative was supported by the district curriculum coordinator, who coordinated logistics and provided leadership and guidance for the work. The initiative began in the summer months with teams of subject-area teachers meeting for half-days, five days a week over the course of six weeks. The first step was to spend several days “unpacking” the standards. This step was crucial for developing a common language and understanding of the standards. Teachers and content specialists engaged in in-depth discussions about the cognitive demand of the standards for specific grade levels. The teams analyzed what the standards required students to do (i.e., identify, evaluate, synthesize, compare) and how similar content standards differed among grade levels. Small groups examined the existing diary maps. This initial step led to many insights by classroom teachers. Sixth-grade ELA teacher Margery Wallace indicated that she had not been aware of how ELA content standards for the author’s purpose differed between sixth and eighth grade. Eighth-grade mathematics teacher Sean Jenkins shared an “ah-ha” moment when he realized that he needed to spend more time on developing his students’ conceptual understanding of algebraic principles rather than the procedural practice he had been emphasizing. The curriculum initiative was carried on by Stoneybrook’s grade-level professional learning committees (PLCs) throughout the school year. The PLCs regularly examined student work, discussed evidence of student learning, and reflected on where in the curriculum student learning could be reinforced.

When asked about the outcomes and successes of the initiative, one teacher summed up the benefits of the work by saying, “We’re much more targeted with our instruction now. I and my fellow teachers have a firm grip on where our students are at and where they need to go—it was an eye-opener to really examine the learning standards and compare our diary maps. At first I was worried that all this was only going to lead to more ‘teaching to the test,’ but now I think it actually helped me to go deeper with my students.” Initial student achievement results in the two years after the summer planning session are promising. District benchmark assessment results show gains, and the school was able to move off of the state’s accountability watch list this year.

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