

1. School Leadership and Districtwide Diagnostics

Vision. Agreed upon statements that provide a clear purpose and goal for meeting; describes the mutual benefit for all members, youth and families. Principals of high-achieving schools communicate to all stakeholders that learning is the school's most important mission (Cotton, 2003; Marzano et al., 2005).

Student Leadership. Highly effective leadership also provides clarity of purpose and strategic planning, leads collective inquiry into best practice and current reality, is action orientated, focuses on results, and builds strong leaders who empower others. (DuFour, DuFour, Eaker, & Karnahek, 2006). One consistent finding in the research is the importance of well-structured opportunities for collaboration that allow school leaders to work in closer partnership with their teachers and students to establish sustained, continuous improvement systems rooted in ongoing data analysis. (Chenoweth, 2009). Many strong leaders know how to have "courageous conversations" about race and culture as they lead to close the achievement gaps. (Annie E. Casey Foundation, 2014; Schumann, Zaki, & Dweck, in press; Singleton & Linton, 2005).

Districtwide Diagnostics - Data Analysis and Early Warning Systems. States, districts and schools have developed comprehensive, longitudinal, student level databases that, at a minimum, include data on student absences, grade retention, and low academic achievement, e.g. *an Early Warning System*. Data should be reviewed regularly, with a particular emphasis before the transitions to middle school and high school. Data systems support a realistic diagnosis of the number of students who dropout and help identify individual students at-high risk of dropping out. A well-implemented early warning system can help educators and others identify students at-risk of dropping out and assign and monitor interventions to keep them on track for graduation and increasing local and state graduation rates.

2. Family and Community Relationships

Student and Family Characteristics. Understanding the student's personal or family characteristics that may impact successful school participation and completion will give educators a better understanding the student's learning difficulties. Once the teacher is aware and acknowledges the impact of these characteristics, he or she will have more patience with the student and tools to create a safe, personalized learning environment that results in helping students feel secure and included when learning is taking place.

Family Engagement. Research consistently finds that family engagement has a direct, positive effect on youth achievement and is the most accurate predictor of a student's success in school. When all groups in a community provide collective support to the school, a strong infrastructure sustains a caring and supportive environment where youth can thrive and achieve.

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3. Student-Educator Learning Supports

Mentoring. The practiced art of developing and maintaining positive and helpful human relationships. Mentoring is a one-to-one caring, supportive relationship between a mentor and a mentee that is based on trust, and is an effective strategy for working with youth in at-risk situations and in need of role models and a positive support system.

Tutoring and Academic Support. Tutoring, also a one-to-one activity, focuses on academics and is an effective practice when addressing specific needs such as reading, writing, or math competencies. Additional academic support and enrichment improves academic performance. These activities should be implemented in conjunction with other recommendations that serve students with disabilities and youth in at-risk situations that are part of the district's comprehensive dropout prevention programs. Opportunities out of instructional time are discussed and available.

4. Effective Instruction and Targeted Interventions

Personalized Learning Environments. A personalized learning environment creates a sense of belonging and fosters a school climate where students and teachers get to know one another and can provide academic, social, and behavioral encouragement. "Environment" includes **school and classroom strategies working together** to create a safe and inclusive environment that is welcoming to both students and families. Students find new and creative ways to solve problems, achieve success, and become lifelong learners when educators show them that there are different ways to learn.

Rigorous and Relevant Instruction. Rigorous and relevant instruction better engages students in learning and provides the skills needed to graduate and to serve them after they leave school. Engagement can be increased by providing students with the necessary skills to complete high school and by introducing students to postsecondary options. Technology courses offer some of the best opportunities for delivering instruction, while engaging students in authentic learning, addressing multiple intelligences, and adapting to students' learning styles.

Classroom Behavior and Social Skills Proficiency. Students are provided the opportunity to learn, develop, and practice classroom behavior and social skills. Staff are provided professional development to identify their personal biases and support students to be prepared for meeting their postsecondary goals related to education and training, employment, and independent living.