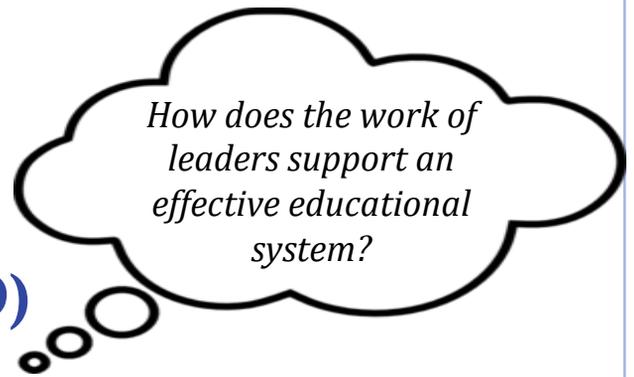


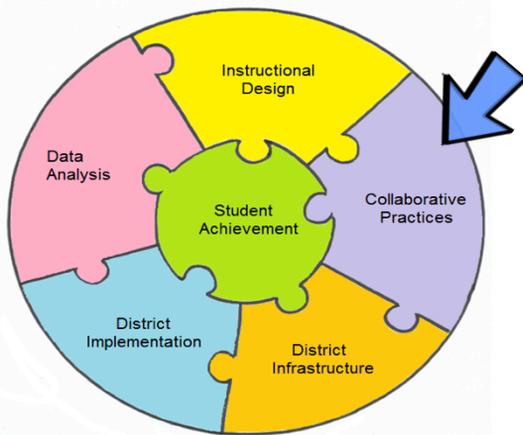
Critical Question #2

How do we teach effectively to ensure students are learning? (DO)



Fundamental Practice 3. Teachers engage in ongoing, intense collaborative work to develop units, lessons, and instructional strategies focused on grade-level expectations.

Purposeful collaboration by grade-level or content-alike teams of teachers has been consistently shown to strengthen the quality of instructional and assessment practices and lead to higher levels of student learning (Dufour, Eaker, & Dufour, 2006). Teachers need to be provided adequate training to understand and effectively engage in collaborative practices. Additionally, teachers need structures and tools such as dedicated time, model agendas, and protocols to plan units, lessons, and teaching strategies. And, all staff should be expected to use effective collaborative practices as they work together. Such collaboration helps ensure a consistent focus on the district's grade-level expectations and provides an equal opportunity for all students to learn the same content. Opportunities for cross-disciplinary collaboration are also important to ensure relevant connections in and among disciplines are identified and understood by students to support the transfer and reinforcement of their learning. Collaboration is shown to be most effective when supported by designating time for meetings, protocols, and skilled facilitation to guide the process and monitoring by leadership with feedback and accountability.

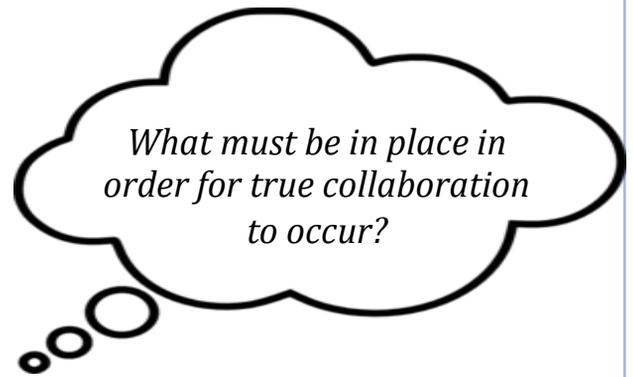


Guiding Questions:

- How are teachers supported in learning and utilizing effective collaborative practices?
- How are teachers regularly collaborating to plan instruction?
- How do teachers collaboratively monitor student progress and ensure students reach mastery through regular reflection regarding effectiveness of instructional strategies?
- How are collaborative practices monitored to ensure effectiveness?

Reflections:

1. As a leader, what is my role in ensuring this fundamental practice is taking place in my district and schools?
2. What are current barriers that are getting in the way of successfully implementing this fundamental practice systemically in my district and schools?
3. When I return to my district/school, I will complete the following three action steps to begin enhancing our (my and my staff's) application of this fundamental practice:
 - a. _____
 - b. _____
 - c. _____



Case Study: Boones Mill Elementary School, Virginia

At Boones Mill Elementary School, a K-5 school serving 400 students in rural Franklin County, Virginia, the powerful collaboration of grade-level teams drives the school improvement process. The following scenario describes what Boones Mill staff members refer to as their teaching-learning process.

The school's five 3rd grade teachers study state and national standards, the district curriculum guide, and student achievement data to identify the essential knowledge and skills that all students should learn in an upcoming language arts unit. They also ask the 4th grade teachers what they hope students will have mastered by the time they leave 3rd grade. On the basis of the shared knowledge generated by this joint study, the 3rd grade team agrees on the critical outcomes that they will make sure each student achieves during the unit.

Next, the team turns its attention to developing common formative assessments to monitor each student's mastery of the essential outcomes. Team members discuss the most authentic and valid ways to assess student mastery. They set the standard for each skill or concept that each student must achieve to be deemed proficient. They agree on the criteria by which they will judge the quality of student work, and they practice applying those criteria until they can do so consistently. Finally, they decide when they will administer the assessments.

After each teacher has examined the results of the common formative assessment for his or her students, the team analyzes how all 3rd graders performed. Team members identify strengths and weaknesses in student learning and begin to discuss how they can build on the strengths and address the weaknesses. The entire team gains new insights into what is working and what is not, and members discuss new strategies that they can implement in their classrooms to raise student achievement.

At Boones Mill, collaborative conversations happen routinely throughout the year. Teachers use frequent formative assessments to investigate the questions "Are students learning what they need to learn?" and "Who needs additional time and support to learn?" rather than relying solely on summative assessments that ask "Which students learned what was intended and which students did not?"

Collaborative conversations call on team members to make public what has traditionally been private—goals, strategies, materials, pacing, questions, concerns, and results. These discussions give every teacher someone to turn to and talk to, and they are explicitly structured to improve the classroom practice of teachers—individually and collectively.

For teachers to participate in such a powerful process, the school must ensure that everyone belongs to a team that focuses on student learning. Each team must have time to meet during the workday and throughout the school year. Teams must focus their efforts on crucial questions related to learning and generate products that reflect that focus, such as lists of essential outcomes, different kinds of assessment, analyses of student achievement, and strategies for improving results. Teams must develop norms or protocols to clarify expectations regarding roles, responsibilities, and relationships among team members. Teams must adopt student achievement goals linked with school and district goals.

For more on DuFour's "Big Ideas" of PLCs visit:

<http://www.ascd.org/publications/educational-leadership/may04/vol61/num08/What-Is-a-Professional-Learning-Community%C2%A2.aspx>

Connect to Resources

For additional resources on this topic, visit the critical question 2, fundamental practice #3 section of the toolkit.