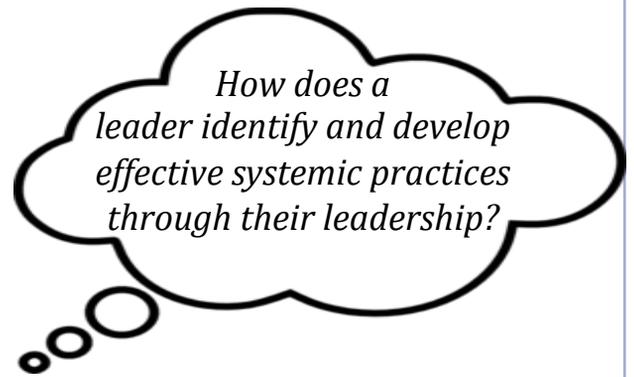


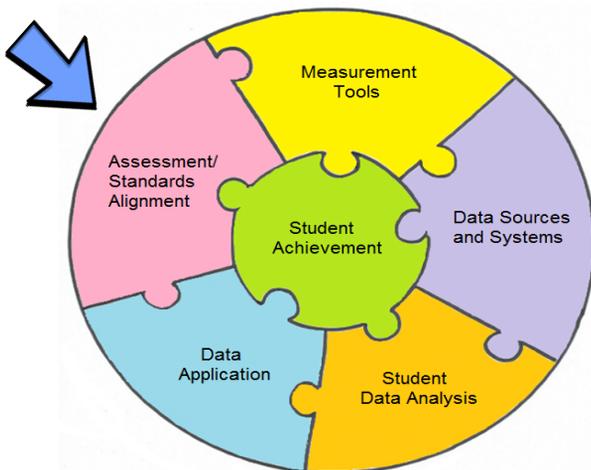
Critical Question #3

How do we know students are learning (Reflect)?



Fundamental Practice 1. All assessments to measure student mastery are tightly aligned with standards and grade-level expectations in the district curriculum.

In a standards-based framework, all assessments at the district, school, and classroom level should be tightly aligned with the grade-level expectations identified in the district's curriculum to ensure they validly and reliably measure those learning expectations. This implies that assessments are designed based on the unique elements of the concept or skill students are being asked to demonstrate. Additionally, as noted in the fundamental practice #2, assessments should also support classroom instruction by providing a meaningful and authentic understanding of mastery-level performance for both teachers and students.

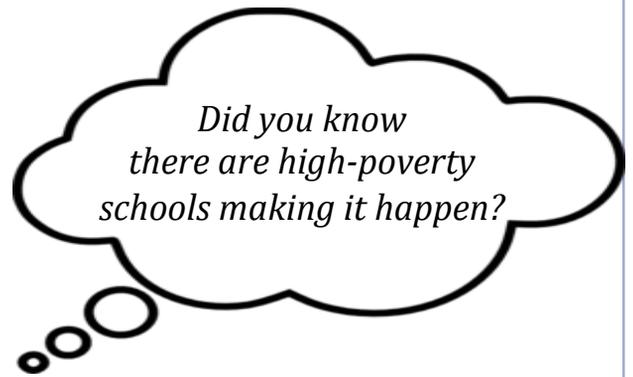
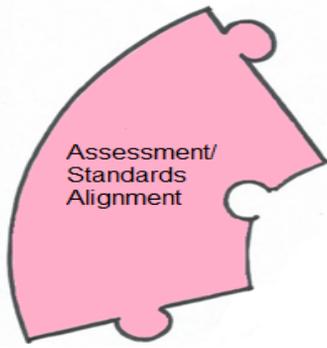


Guiding Questions:

- How does the district ensure summative, interim, and formative assessments are tightly aligned to grade-level expectations and evidence outcomes identified in the district's curriculum?
- How do schools ensure performance expectations on assessments are clearly explained to students as part of instruction?

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. _____



A LESSON FROM THE FIELD

In *Teaching with Poverty in Mind* (2009), Eric Jensen offered the exemplar of North Star Academy in New Jersey as a school whose emphasis on standards led to significant improvement. How did North Star do it? The school provided an innovative approach to personalizing its commitment to ensuring student mastery of the content standards. Using interim assessments, aligned with curriculum and state standards, every six to eight weeks the understanding by teachers of student needs were refined. Results were provided to teachers in easy-to-read spreadsheets while the assistant principals and lead teachers walked-through a minimum of 85% of the classrooms providing informal feedback.

A school developed data analysis sheet and instructional plan template took the data from the observations and from the interim student assessments to make connections and adaptations of teaching and learning. Collaborative teaching groups also analyzed results to identify student mastery of the standard and decide instructional implications such as the need for additional instruction in the form of small-group work, tutoring, or acceleration. While developing plans to differentiate instruction, teachers also made plans to supplement other forms of support to help each student attain grade-level proficiency. Trained in the data management system, teachers used it to organize the student assessment data and then determine instructional groupings. The questions, “How can I teach this differently?” and “What needs to change so that the student will achieve mastery?” guided the school culture.

North Star Academy

- Served 384 students
- 99 percent of the student population were minorities
- 90 percent of the students received free or reduced-priced lunch
- Graduation Rate = 100%
- Highest rate of four-year college acceptance and attendance of any school in the state of New Jersey, regardless of socioeconomic level

North Star’s Action Steps:

- Turn standards into meaningful units
- Pre-assess to determine students’ background knowledge
- Adjust the lesson plans according to the pre-assessment results

Connect to Resources

For additional resources on assessment/ standard alignment, visit the critical question 3, fundamental practice #1 section of the toolkit.