Individual Item Prompts

Teacher Leadership

6.1a: Teachers are recognized as educational experts.

Teachers bring a wealth of knowledge to the classroom. With formal training in a wide variety of instructional delivery methods, comprehensive content knowledge, effective management skills, and continuous professional development, they are experts in the field of education. As experts, their primary role in education is to disseminate information to children in meaningful ways.

Often there is a difference between the actual educational acumen of teachers and the perception of teacher practice and capacity by those outside the teaching profession. Are teachers recognized by parents, administrators, and other professional organizations in the community as the educational experts they really are?

Table Group Activity
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6.1a: Reflections

How and for what are teachers recognized at your school?
* Is the recognition based on criteria about teacher expertise? What are teachers' expectations for recognition? What are their preferences? * Are there ways these forms of recognition could be put in place?
How are teachers perceived by others?
* Are their differences between the perceived expertise teachers have of themselves and how others perceive them? Why? * How are teachers perceived by school leadership? What evidence is there to support these perceptions? * How are teachers perceived by parents/guardians? * How are teachers perceived by the community? Across all aspects of community (business, media, etc.)? * What may be driving those perceptions? What concrete actions, if any, are necessary to address the root cause of these perceptions?

6.1b: Teachers are trusted to make sound professional decisions about instruction.

Teachers' primary role within a school is to provide instruction to students. There are hundreds of decisions made every day by teachers about how to best assist them in learning. Schools invest substantially in professional development to ensure teachers are up to date on their instructional strategies. Efforts to standardize educational practice through shared standards, curriculum and instructional practice, no matter how well intentioned, can be viewed as constraining by some teachers. While new educators in particular may need more scripted and paced instructional support, veteran educators with demonstrated results can find them confining. Leaving some of the most qualified practitioners of our educational system out of instructional decisions not only removes an important voice in decision making process, it disenfranchises teachers in the school and district community.

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6.1b: Reflections

At your school, where are teachers actively engaged in decisions about instruction?
* Do teachers know these opportunities are available? Do all teachers? Are the most accomplished practitioners engaged in decisions about teaching and learning?   * Do teachers view this as an empowering activity?
Are opportunities for teachers to contribute to instructional decisions equitable?
Are there places where teachers have been given opportunities to contribute to instructional decision-making, but they have not engaged?
* Why did this happen?   * When teachers do not engage in these opportunities, what effect does this have on school leadership?
Where do teachers at your school feel they could be better integrated into instructional decisions?
* What policies and practices are in place at the school that would lead teachers to not feel trusted? At the district, state or federal levels?   * What decisions are teachers free to make on their own in their classroom? in their grade or content?   * What are teachers' expectations about autonomy in teaching? Is there resistance to state standards? to the state's Voluntary Curriculum? To the instructional materials selected/made available? To working with other teachers in Professional Learning Communities or grade/content groups?

6.1c: Teachers are relied upon to make decisions about educational issues.

Including teachers into the decision-making process about educational issues in the school is an important part of teacher empowerment and developing an atmosphere of trust and mutual respect in the school. Teachers bring the experiences of working on the "front lines" with students, providing a unique understanding of how policies affect classroom practice and student learning. When teachers are included in the decision-making process, they are more personally vested in and willing to support the outcome.

Including teachers in the process can be challenging. Ensuring the vast array of teachers' perspectives are included and finding time to include teachers (or representatives of the faculty) in the process can be difficult. Consider what systems your school has in place currently to include teachers in the decision-making process and reflect on whether they are effective.

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6.1c: Reflections

How is data being gathered?

* Are formal assessments accurately representing intended student learning outcomes? How do you know?
* What are some advantages and disadvantages of common assessments across subjects or grade levels?
* What informal assessments are being made and included in the refinement of decision making?

Is data from formal and informal assessment processes accessible to educators in a timely manner?

If not, what steps can be taken to make that turnaround process more efficient?

What systems are currently in place to help include teachers in the decision-making process? Are those systems effective?

* Do teachers feel included in the process? How do you know?
* Do all teachers feel included? Are some teachers more likely than others to participate? Why? What is the impact on decisions made and school culture?
* Are there ways to make the decision-making process more transparent?
* Are there areas of decision-making that teachers want to have more say?
* What kinds of follow through are in place to keep teachers apprised of the process?

How does the aspect of time impact these decisions?

* What adjustments can be made to better accommodate teachers into the process?
* How are faculty meetings used? What role do committees or other groups with teacher representation play in decision-making?

Are educators adequately trained in the effective use of data?

* Have teachers been taught effective data collection strategies?
* Have teachers and administrators been provided staff development on incorporating data in to teaching practice?
* What supports are in place for beginning teachers?
* Could different professional development be provided to veteran teachers to enhance their practice?
* Do teachers have time and sufficient resources to engage in this process in a meaningful way?

Where are decisions being made unilaterally?

* Are those areas where teachers would prefer to have more say in the process?
* How are those decisions communicated? Do teachers have the knowledge and/or expertise to participate in any of these decisions?
* Can adjustments be made to the process that would allow more teacher input?

6.1d: Teachers are encouraged to participate in school leadership roles.

In addition to having formal opportunities in place for teachers take on school leadership roles, they must also be supported in a variety of ways to engage willingly and thrive in those opportunities. Many teachers need protected time to be willing to engage in a leadership activity on top of their existing classroom obligations. Some teachers may be more inclined to take on leadership opportunities if they felt more comfortable with the role. Providing access to leadership training may be an important driver to encourage leadership participation. Some teachers may benefit from being given opportunities to interact with colleagues within the school as well as across the district to combat some of the isolation that can occur in the classroom setting.

With more supports in place, teachers may find a more comfortable transition into leadership roles. As you reflect on your school's leadership opportunities, also consider what supports are in place to promote teacher participation.

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6.1d: Reflections

What opportunities (in addition to professional learning communities) are in place for teachers to work collaboratively with colleagues?
* At the school? * Within the district? * What additional opportunities could be provided?
What supports are currently in place to promote teachers to take on leadership roles?
* Are those supports consistent? * Are those supports equitably available across the entire school staff? * Are teachers aware of the supports that are in place?
Are opportunities in place for teachers to share their thoughts on existing supports as well as potential new supports to promote leadership participation?

6.1e: The faculty has an effective process for making group decisions to solve problems.

All schools have processes for solving problems, but these may not be viewed as effective by the entire faculty. Many educators may not be able to clearly articulate that process, may not know what outcomes have occurred, or may not believe that those outcomes truly address the problem at hand. Having a transparent and equitable system for solving problems can greatly contribute to the relationship between site administrators and teachers.

Identifying and sharing problems can be challenging in schools where teachers and administrators do not share a trusting relationship. If there is not a healthy trust and mutual respect between teachers and administrators, there may be a number of problems in the school that are not getting addressed because teachers are not willing to bring those problems up with leadership. Often, there are differences in perception between teachers and administrators on what is a problem in the school, as well as whether efforts made have actually solved the problem.

A key to addressing this condition is clear communication. A safe and efficient process must be in place to identify problems. There needs to be an inclusive dialog about how those problems are addressed. Follow through must occur after a decision is made to make sure the problem is resolved and the results should be communicated to the faculty.

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6.1e: Reflections

From the teachers' perspective, what would the ideal system look like?

* Where are teachers included in the process?
* Are there problems teachers do not need to be involved in?
* Are there problems teachers need to be involved in but are not?
* How does time impact what parts of the process teachers can be included in?
* What barriers are in the way to effective communication with administration about this process?

What system is currently in place to solve problems in the school?

* Do both teachers and administrators see that system the same way?
* Is the system working for both groups?
* Is it equitable?
* What is effective about the current system?
* What is not working with the current system?

From the administrators' perspective, what would the ideal system look like?

* Are there places teachers should be included, but they are not engaging in the process?
* Are there problems administrators feel they should address unilaterally?
* What barriers are in the way to effective communication with teachers about this process?

6.1f: In this school we take steps to solve problems.

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6.1f: Reflections

From the teachers' perspective, what would the ideal system look like?

* Where are teachers included in the process? Which teachers?
* Are there problems teachers do not need to be involved in? In what areas? How are the knowledge and skills of teachers assessed and marshaled toward solving problems?
* How does time impact what parts of the process teachers can be included in?
* What barriers are in the way to effective communication with administration about this process?

What systems are currently in place to solve problems in the school?

* Do both teachers and administrators see those systems the same way?
* Are the systems working for both groups?
* What is effective about the current systems?
* What is not working with the current systems? Are the problems more rooted in the processes in place (participants, decision-making structures, etc.) or in the inability to get consistent outcomes that address issues?

From the administrators' perspective, what would the ideal system look like?

* Are there places teachers should be included, but they are not engaging in the process?
* Are there problems administrators feel they should address unilaterally?
* What barriers are in the way to effective communication with teachers about this process?

6.1g: Teachers are effective leaders in this school.

Teachers can take on a variety of formal and informal leadership roles in school. Informally, teachers take leadership responsibility all the time in their own classrooms, moving around the school building, supporting other teachers in collaborative settings, and interacting with parents.

Formally, teachers also have many opportunities to take leadership responsibility at their schools. Coaching sports, chairing departments or academic teams, providing professional development, mentoring beginning teachers, and participating in school improvement teams are just some of the ways teachers can be active in leading in their schools. They may also be asked to participate in the design of school student behavior plans, scheduling, student placements, and designing curriculum.

While the informal leadership teachers engage in is important, having a wide variety of formal leadership roles is critical for teacher development and school culture.

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6.1g: Reflections

What formal leadership roles are available for teachers to participate in?
* Do all teachers know these opportunities exist? * Are those opportunities available to all teachers or only a few? * Are those leadership roles short or long term and how does this impact the accessibility of leadership roles for others?
Are there leadership opportunities teachers would like to engage in that are not offered to them?
Are the leadership opportunities in your school perceived as an opportunity by the faculty?
How do you know?
Is the work teachers put forth in leadership roles acknowledged?
* In what ways? * Are there other ways to acknowledge them?