LEADERSHIP for LEARNING:
Characteristics of High-Performing SCHOOLS

CURRICULUM & EXPECTATIONS
♦ School educators emphasize and model the importance of learning by holding high expectations, setting goals, and working persistently to achieve them.

♦ Educators believe that all students can learn and act in ways that ensure student success--attempting to reach students who appear to not care about learning and to stimulate capable students with appropriate challenges.

♦ Learning standards are clearly defined; appropriately challenging for all groups; and are promoted by appropriate alignment of curriculum, instruction, and assessment.

♦ Students take advantage of and benefit from adequate and relevant extracurricular opportunities.

♦ Curriculum is clearly written, articulated, and used consistently by teachers.

♦ Curriculum is mapped (sequenced and paced), appropriately aligned with standards and assessments, prioritized to better meet student needs.

♦ Curriculum incorporates higher-level thinking and workplace skills (which are clearly defined and consistently addressed).

♦ Curriculum emphasizes diversity and multicultural perspectives.

♦ Curriculum and instruction are designed to ensure reading and math literacy (by second grade) and to maintain on grade level performance.

♦ Curriculum priorities are supported by adequate materials, technology, and planning time.

♦ Curriculum priorities are supported by appropriate use of Educational Assistants and/or volunteers.

♦ Curriculum priorities are supported by appropriate professional development opportunities including mentoring.

♦ Curriculum expectations are appropriately communicated to and supported by parenting adults and community members.

♦ Teachers collaborate to develop integrated, connected instructional units (which are available to other educators).

INSTRUCTION
♦ Instructional time (schoolwide and in classrooms) is protected (e.g., minimal to no interruptions, quality blocks of time, high levels of on-task student behavior) to ensure productive use of time.

♦ Teachers clearly communicate learning expectations to students and actively monitor student performance to ensure attainment of objectives.

♦ Instruction addresses the “why” question (“Why do we have to learn this stuff?”) by providing academic tasks that are relevant, worthwhile, and within the students’ abilities.
Teachers use a wide range of effective, interactive, student-centered teaching strategies including true cooperative learning, activators, think-pair-share, KWL, graphic organizers, mnemonics, etc.

Teachers differentiate instruction to meet diverse student needs (e.g., incorporating appropriate technology; addressing Multiple Intelligences; providing assistance and tutoring; preteaching, remedial, and enrichment opportunities).

Teachers effectively manage students when using differentiated, multitask structures (i.e., keeping students working productively when several instructional activities are happening simultaneously).

Teachers require students to transfer learning by requiring its use in varied academic situations (and subjects) and simulated experiences.

Instruction incorporates authentic learning experiences (and projects) requiring students to assume real-world roles and to exhibit skills of productive citizenship such as making decisions, solving problems, and investigating topics like they will in life after school.

Instruction incorporates teaching students the tools of lifelong learning by specifically teaching the skills of higher level thinking and self-directed learning and by requiring students to practice those skills through meaningful learning experiences.

Instruction promotes respect and empathy among students of different socioeconomic and cultural backgrounds.

Instruction is extended by appropriate homework consistent with developmental guidelines and collaboratively created schoolwide policies.

Instruction incorporates assessment-like practice and is designed to give students skill and confidence when performing on standardized and other required assessments.

Teachers provide lesson plans to ensure productive and appropriate learning experiences with substitutes teachers.

Educators within the school provide the extra support necessary for high needs students to meet state standards and to achieve school success.

Teachers’ decisions about instructional groups are consistent with students’ academic and affective needs (e.g., heterogeneous, homogeneous skills groups, flexible & fluid groupings).

Educators have adequate opportunities for professional development activities that are aligned with school improvement priorities.

Professional development plans for all educators include ongoing, job-embedded, and meaningful activities to promote professional growth and increased student achievement.

ASSESSMENT

Benchmark assessments (aligned with prioritized curriculum) are given at regular, designated intervals.

Assessments range from traditional (requiring students to primarily recall information) to alternative (requiring the use of higher level thinking skills and application of knowledge).

Assessment results are used to gear instruction to student needs and to provide timely remediation, enrichment, acceleration, tutoring, etc.
♦ Assessments are structured for student success by incorporating additional opportunities for students to improve results.

♦ Assessments are reliable in determining the quality of student performance based on the consistent use of rubrics, rating scales, and other evaluation tools.

♦ Assessment results are communicated to parenting adults in addition to conferencing and goal setting.

♦ Assessment results are reported in longitudinal records or portfolios that are accessible to teachers.

ORGANIZATIONAL PROCESSES
♦ A clearly defined process for allocation of resources is in effect.

♦ Resources (teaching assistance, teacher assignments) are allocated on the basis of need, not entitlement.

♦ Productive use of resources provide maximum support for staff performance and student achievement.

♦ Educators are focused on building leadership capacity (i.e., hiring, training, and retaining high-quality educators) to ensure sustained, positive change.

♦ Novice teachers are expected to succeed and are supported by an effective mentoring program, graduated induction priorities, and minimal negative circumstances while learning to teach.

♦ Faculty members are organized strategically--horizontally and vertically--to ensure shared responsibility for student learning and to make progress on improvement priorities.

♦ Educator teams are organized with clear roles and responsibilities to ensure productive team performance and support to guarantee that all members contribute equitably.

♦ Strong instructional leadership is evident with school leaders in classrooms on a frequent and regular basis gathering information and providing reinforcement, suggestions, and support.

♦ Administrative leadership and school faculty are held accountable for results on school improvement through regular monitoring and interactive feedback/problem solving sessions.

♦ Educators accept accountability and are results-oriented; learning from mistakes, building on strengths, increasing expectations for success, and persisting with priorities.

♦ Open communication, professional risk taking, collaborative decision making, and timely follow through ensure schoolwide emphasis on improvement priorities.

♦ Student learning and success are supported by effective policies for grading, assessment, attendance, promotion, discipline, etc.

♦ School policies and practices ensure a seamless and successful transition for students as they cross grade and school levels.

♦ Monitoring practices ensure that all students experience equity and access to high-quality curricular and instructional programs.

♦ Schoolwide placement and grouping of students is strategic rather than random and is consistent with research-based practice (i.e., students not underplaced, not inappropriately placed, students experience varied short and long term groupings ).
Teachers and school administrators are diligent in applying research-based practices learned in professional development activities.

Two-way communications within the school and with parents and community are evident and effective.

School educators provide a range of options to encourage parenting adults and community members to be actively involved in the education of children.

School educators collaborate with community agencies to meet the survival needs of families.

As students leave our school, they exhibit traits of self-directed, lifelong learners who can successfully use the essential “tools” of thinking and productive living.

Educators acknowledge progress, recognize and celebrate successes, and enhance the school’s public image and to help strengthen stakeholder commitment to, and ownership of change.

**LEARNING ENVIRONMENT & RELATIONSHIPS**

Educators experience collegial and professional relationships and spend more time and energy on doing what is best for students rather than on issues or activities not directly related to learning.

School and classroom learning environments are welcoming and supportive with clear and consistent incentives and discipline policies in place.

School and classroom learning environments are orderly with supportive relationships, academic risk taking, and positive attitudes toward learning.

Student peer culture is one that values academic success. Students strive for their own “personal bests” and exhibit motivation to learn.

Students exhibit leadership, behave appropriately, and accept responsibility for learning and behavior.

**SCHOOL IMPROVEMENT**

Educators collect, organize, manage, and analyze data to identify high-priority student needs and productive actions to address.

Educators are actively involved in developing a few, clear school improvement priorities and goals and are fully committed to achieving them.

Administrative leadership provides appropriate guidance and adequate resources, support, and encouragement to achieve school improvement priorities.

**References:**


Dr. Max Thompson, Learning Focused Schools, Learning Concepts and Assessments, Inc.

