

Leadership System

The Leadership System focuses on decision-making, operational management, and upholding the vision, mission, and goals of the district over time. A district's leadership system addresses how the district, as a whole, will engage the students, staff, and the community, as well as the process for implementing the district's strategic plan through day-to-day operations. The leadership system provides the structures to develop the capacity of the adults within the district to utilize their skills and behaviors to positively impact teacher and leader performance, and to support student learning.

Research centered on the leadership system identifies a set of evidence-based practices around key areas of focus implemented by leaders throughout the system. Each practice has actions for central office leaders who are making district-wide decisions for all, which are detailed below, as well as actions taken by building leaders who are establishing norms and routines for individual buildings within the district (detailed in a separate document). These areas of focus start with Shaping the District's Identity and Building Positive Relationships with the people in the district, including students, staff, and the broader community. These both lead to the third area, Developing the Desired District Climate and Culture, which utilizes the practices of the previous areas through policies and practices. All of these set the stage for the next area, Developing Capacity for Instruction and Student Support to ensure that district systems are addressing the needs of learners. The fifth area addresses the key operational levers available to leaders - Allocating Resources to Support the District Mission. Once all of these are functioning, the final area of Managing District Systems for Continuous Improvement and Compliance maintains and sustains the various systems over time.

Practices and Progress Indicators

SHAPE THE DISTRICT'S IDENTITY

PRACTICE	IN#	GETTING STARTED	GETTING BETTER	KEEP IMPROVING
1. District leaders establish the identity of the district through the creation and implementation of a student-centered vision and mission.	1	District leaders engage representative members of their community, including students, staff, parents, and representative members of the community, for the purpose of sharing perspectives in order to develop a student-centered vision and mission for the district.	District leaders seek input from all individuals within their district community with regard to the development of a district mission and "portrait of a graduate" (or similar consideration). This feedback, along with representative voices from constituent members of their district community, is used to shape the district mission and vision.	The district vision/mission team reviews community feedback on possible options for the mission, vision, and related documents (i.e. portrait of a graduate, graduation guarantees, or similar statements) and selects statements that might be used to communicate goals and drive future policy and planning for the district.
2. District and building leaders communicate district identity and focus through their actions, decisions, and deliberate messaging.	2	District leaders work with students, staff, and the community to develop a communication plan around the district identity.	District leaders facilitate the implementation of the plan as a means to promote the district identity and focus. District and building leaders work to identify communications that will be specific to each audience regarding the identity and focus of the district.	District leaders establish and maintain a communications team to promote the identity and focus of the district to all audience groups. District and building leaders seek out audience perception and feedback to help refine general messaging, and to identify needed communication around specific district policies, programs, and decisions that affect members of the district community.

BUILD POSITIVE RELATIONSHIPS

PRACTICE	IN#	GETTING STARTED	GETTING BETTER	KEEP IMPROVING
3. District and building leaders engage with students, staff, and community through formal and informal communications to share ideas and build trust.	3a	District and building leaders take regular opportunities to engage with students and staff through classroom visits, classroom walkthroughs, and other regular school functions. District and building leaders interact with students, staff, and community members at extracurricular events and community activities.	District and building leaders engage in regular informal communication with students, staff, and community in and out of school, and also set up dedicated times to engage in informal conversation or communication, such as office hours, coffee hours, or similar opportunities. Leaders use such times to focus on listening and relationship building.	District and building leaders set up multiple informal communication channels with students, staff, and community to focus on listening, feedback, and to develop trust and a sense of community. Such opportunities are frequent and include direct personal interaction, access through scheduled opportunities for interaction and social media engagement. Leaders follow up on questions and seek ongoing feedback.
	3b	District leaders engage representative constituent groups, including students, staff, and community members, through formal participation in advisory meetings.	District leaders seek to include students, staff, and community members in both advisory meetings and in direct school functions to gather feedback and to include representative voices in decision-making meetings.	District leaders establish formal advisory groups and leadership networks that include students, staff, and community representatives. Additionally, district and building leaders engage with organizations for the purpose of representing the district and collecting feedback. District or building leaders have no decision making authority in these organizations.
4. District and building leaders establish communications networks to share information with students, staff, and the community and gather feedback to inform practice.	4	District and building leaders use standard district communications, including print newsletters, email, and social media to share information about the district and to engage learners. Leaders also use local communication networks, such as print, radio, television, and online media connections to share information.	District and building leaders use standard communications networks and media to disseminate district information, while also establishing feedback opportunities for students, staff, and community members to share perspectives and concerns regarding school plans or decisions. District leaders enable such practices for board members.	District and building leaders regularly use two-way communication networks and media tools to engage students, staff, and community members in district related planning and advisory support. Leaders receive and utilize training in active listening and feedback protocols, and have regular procedures for follow-up on questions or conversations.

PRACTICE	IN#	GETTING STARTED	GETTING BETTER	KEEP IMPROVING
<p>5. District and building leaders leverage students, staff, and community to strengthen relationships, develop messaging, and promote the goals and actions of the district.</p>	<p>5a</p>	<p>District leaders establish advisory committees or working groups to support the creation of district policies or implementation strategies for academic or student support programs. These committees identify or designate students, staff, and/or community members as participants.</p>	<p>District and building leaders establish multiple representative working groups for students, staff, parents, and community members for ongoing policy advising and program review. Each group is representative of that specific community, and is tasked with specific expectations and outcomes focusing on representation and communication with specific groups within the district community.</p>	<p>District and building leaders establish multiple representative working groups for students, staff, parents, and community members, and they incorporate these perspectives in leadership groups that make district decisions. Members of these groups change every 1-2 years to incorporate new perspectives. Such individuals are trained in facilitation and data review strategies to support effective participation.</p>
	<p>5b</p>	<p>District and building leaders engage students, staff, and community members in contributing to and/or reviewing school communication strategies and messaging. These members provide feedback on policies and programs, and might be included in communication delivery efforts.</p>	<p>District and building leaders partner with student, staff, and community member organizations or groups to create and provide feedback on district communications regarding policies and programming of the district. Leaders use common messaging focused on different audience needs and delivery platforms used by these organizations.</p>	<p>District and building leaders establish two-way communication networks with constituent groups that include students, staff, and community members. District leaders establish communication protocols to ensure that all groups have a common understanding and expectations, and then engage these networks to provide and respond to messaging around specific policies and programs of the district.</p>

DEVELOP THE DESIRED DISTRICT CLIMATE AND CULTURE

PRACTICE	IN#	GETTING STARTED	GETTING BETTER	KEEP IMPROVING
6. District and building leaders establish, model, and promote expectations for safety, support, and equity for all.	6a	District and building leaders create and communicate policies and practices that are specifically designed to promote a safe and supportive environment for students, staff, and community members.	District and building leaders create and communicate policies for a safe and supportive school environment, and identify expected norms and behaviors for individuals within the district that foster these policies. Leaders adhere to these behaviors themselves and model such practices in all interactions.	District and building leaders create and communicate policies for a safe and supportive school environment and model behaviors that support this. The district embraces policies that reinforce such expectations of all within the district and use trauma informed instruction and restorative practices. Leaders regularly monitor and problem solve issues in the student support system.
	6b	District leaders define diversity, voice, equity, and opportunity, and connect these with the district mission and vision. District and building leaders examine and acknowledge patterns in data and practices that lead to inequitable outcomes, and identify strategies to close outcome gaps within the district.	District leaders identify formal programs and informal practices that might lead to inequitable outcomes for specific students, staff, or community groups. District and building leaders monitor operational practices and outcomes that can lead to such inequities, and engage in problem solving practices specific to these within the student support and talent management systems of the district.	District leaders engage in equity audits to review policies and practices that lead to inequitable outcomes for specific student, staff, or community groups. District leaders review resource allocation to ensure that groups that might need supplemental support receive appropriate resources. District and building leaders develop strategies to remove inequities and monitor operational practices and outcomes for these strategies and all component systems within the district.
7. District and building leaders establish norms for engagement, dialogue, and response to address challenging issues and actions.	7	District and building leaders establish meeting norms and expected practices for all standard interactions. Leaders model such practices and provide training to other leaders (district and building leaders and leaders of collaborative teams) around these norms and communication practices.	District and/or building leaders work with all collaborative teams within the district to establish shared norms and expectations for engagement, and allow each team to adapt or modify these norms in ways that meet the specific needs of the team. District and building leaders provide access to training on conflict resolution, meeting facilitation, and effective feedback for participants on such teams.	District and/or building leaders work with collaborative teams to establish a common set of norms for meetings, staff collaboration, and community engagement. These processes include protocols and considerations for group adaptation of norms. Leaders establish a timeline for decision-making functions to ensure that decisions involving contentious policies or practices seek involvement from different perspectives. Depending on district size and capacity, districts might establish an ombudsman role to review and advocate for individuals on challenging issues that directly affect them.

PRACTICE	IN#	GETTING STARTED	GETTING BETTER	KEEP IMPROVING
8. District and building leaders implement protocols for decision-making and discourse and policies to promote the desired district climate and culture.	8a	District leaders identify a set of standard protocols for staff interaction in meetings and other collaborative discussions. Such protocols might address data review for decision-making, discussion and feedback in staff or leadership meetings, or community engagement. Such protocols are used to clarify and enhance two-way communication around district practices and programming.	District and building leaders communicate and implement protocols for communication in meetings and other collaborative discussions to foster communication and support of the district vision and mission. District leaders work with building and instructional leaders to incorporate similar concepts into classroom discussion to promote communication and discourse among students. District and building leaders introduce and regularly use similar practices in external communication with the community.	District and building leaders implement and model the use of protocols in ways that promote the purpose of the interaction and the desired opportunities for collaborative communication and engagement of staff, students, and community. Such protocols are provided in print or visual form in any such meeting to convey the desired means of engagement in a way that welcomes critical perspectives to meetings. District leaders regularly review the use of such protocols and perceptions around the protocols for refinement and continuous improvement of communication.
	8b	District and building leaders establish policies for behavior, communication, and interaction that will promote the desired climate and culture of the district and/or building. Leaders communicate these policies to staff, students, and community to establish norms and expectations for positive interaction and promotion of the district vision and mission.	District and building leaders communicate district or school policies to students, staff, and community, and establish expectations for practice. Leaders identify the ways in which policies will be implemented and enforced, and identify potential consequences and responses for situations when policies are not followed. Leaders establish expectations for staff, students, and community to support the implementation of such policies.	District and building leaders identify potential indicators of district policies and monitor and review data relevant to the implementation (or lack thereof) of such policies in the district. Leaders review and refine policies, and respond to inconsistencies in implementation to support the desired climate and culture of the district. District leaders work with building leaders to identify variations in policy relative to the nature and focus of the building or circumstance that each policy is addressing.

DEVELOP CAPACITY FOR INSTRUCTION AND STUDENT SUPPORT

PRACTICE	IN#	GETTING STARTED	GETTING BETTER	KEEP IMPROVING
9. District and building leaders develop and communicate models of instruction and student support that reflect the identity, vision, and mission of the district.	9	District leaders create clear and understandable models of instruction and student support that are directly connected to the vision and mission of the district. These models describe the actions to be taken and anticipated outcomes for students, staff, and community.	District leaders communicate models of instruction and student support that are aligned to the district mission and vision. District and building leaders seek feedback from students, staff, and community to clarify and reinforce models of instruction and student support to reflect district identity, vision, and mission.	District and building leaders utilize district models of instruction and student support to convey the work of the district to staff, students, and community. Leaders provide authentic examples and descriptions of these models in practice, and use these models to promote the focus and identity of the district. Leaders seek feedback from others around these models to continuously refine and improve implementation of these models in classrooms throughout the district.
10. District and building leaders support and leverage the work of effective and innovative educators within the district to shape and model instruction and student support.	10a	District leaders initiate innovation by inviting suggestions or proposals from instructional (or other) staff regarding new strategies or resources for instruction or student support. Those with promising ideas might be given an opportunity to further develop or implement a small-scale pilot of these strategies in their classroom or through extra-curricular programming.	District and building leaders promote innovation by establishing a formalized process to propose innovative instructional or support strategies. Successful proposals are given a trial period, within the feasibility of other requirements in the school, for implementation. Outcome data are identified and reviewed to determine continuation or extension of such innovations in the district.	District leaders establish a leadership team devoted to innovation that generates and reviews proposals for innovative instructional or student support strategies. The team has processes and protocols for review and determinations for continuation and scaling of innovations based upon outcomes. District resources are allocated for support of team functions and implementation of innovations.
	10b	District and building leaders recognize instructional and support staff who explore, create, and use innovative instructional strategies. Leaders review such practices and determine how to encourage others to observe or collaborate with these individuals to model exemplary or innovative practices.	District and building leaders recognize innovative educators and support staff and encourage them to explore or implement new strategies that the district might wish to implement. These innovative educators provide advisory or planning support for improvement or innovation efforts within the district, and they use their classroom for pilot implementation efforts.	District and building leaders regularly utilize innovative educators and support staff to model instruction and mentor other educators in implementing innovative instruction or student support. The district incorporates several such individuals to form an innovation advisory group to specifically explore innovative resources or strategies. Leaders ensure that innovators participate in collaborative teams to promote exploration and implementation of new ideas.

PRACTICE	IN#	GETTING STARTED	GETTING BETTER	KEEP IMPROVING
11. District and building leaders regularly monitor instruction and student support efforts to ensure effective implementation and continuous improvement.	11a	District and building leaders establish instructional leadership routines and initiate walkthrough observation practices in classrooms as a means of monitoring instructional and student support practices.	District leaders identify norms and expectations for instructional walkthrough observations and student support efforts and refine the practices for observation once a majority of educators are implementing desired practices with fidelity. District leaders oversee building leaders' use of instructional leadership routines to focus on continuous improvement of instruction.	District leaders monitor the implementation of instructional leadership routines by building and instructional leaders and expand observation practices to incorporate peer observation and other teacher collaboration routines. District and building leaders transition the observational focus to new areas of instruction and student support when implementing new practices or when fidelity of practice is observed.
	11b	District and building leaders identify and gather data from instructional observations and student support efforts to utilize data-based decision-making around instruction, professional learning, or coaching of educators. Leaders ensure the validity of data collected through calibration of observation with all observers.	District and building leaders incorporate instructional observation data on a regular basis in district and building level leadership discussions. Data from observations is used to inform continuous improvement efforts for instructional and student support systems. Leaders monitor observation data using improvement cycles.	District and building leaders regularly use instructional observations along with other monitoring practices for instructional and student support systems. Leaders use data to adjust implementation and explore correlation of instructional data with student outcome data to support continuous improvement.
12. District and building leaders engage in and foster partnerships, coaching, and mentoring of educators and staff to support practices of the instructional and student support systems.	12a	District leaders initiate partnership meetings with building leaders under their supervision to develop and plan building level implementation efforts around instructional and student support system practices.	District leaders meet regularly with building leaders in partnership meetings to discuss building level implementation of district policies, and to discuss how building level implementation issues can inform district policies and practices. Partnership meeting agendas are planned in advance to address long-term system implementation issues as well as ad hoc problem-solving issues that require immediate solutions.	District leaders plan and coordinate partnership meetings with building leaders to address long-term planning and implementation of district systems and building level routines. District and building leaders collaboratively determine the schedule and individual meeting agendas for these meetings, using improvement cycles as a data-based decision-making process for each partnership. Individual building leaders might have multiple partnership meetings with district and other building leaders.

PRACTICE	IN#	GETTING STARTED	GETTING BETTER	KEEP IMPROVING
	12b	District leaders engage in coaching conversations with building leaders, instructional and support leaders within the district. New district and building leaders are assigned a mentor for general leadership advice.	District leaders engage in regular coaching conversations with building, instructional and student support leaders, focusing on implementation of systems and district policy. District leaders assist building and instructional leaders with leadership planning and problem solving around administrative tasks. New district and building leaders meet regularly with mentors and collaboratively develop a learning plan for their own development.	District leaders engage in regular coaching conversations with other leaders within the district. Leaders receive training around coaching strategies and implement protocols for providing quality coaching and feedback. Coaching sessions might address problem solving or immediate issues, otherwise sessions are planned around a long-term professional learning plan for each individual leader.

ALLOCATE RESOURCES TO SUPPORT THE DISTRICT MISSION

PRACTICE	IN#	GETTING STARTED	GETTING BETTER	KEEP IMPROVING
13. District and building leaders develop and implement financial and other resource allocation decisions to support the mission and welfare of the district as an organization.	13	District leaders establish a budgeting process that starts with an assessment of needs relative to the district mission and vision. District leaders allocate special purpose funds (i.e. federal and state grant funds) to programming needs before making decisions regarding general use funds.	District leaders annually review the budget process and allocations relative to outcomes to ensure that programs are having the desired improvements in student and staff outcomes over time. Budgets incorporate some building- and program-level autonomy and support equitable opportunities for all students by prioritizing areas of greatest need.	District and building leaders use a needs assessment and cost-balance ratio indicators to determine resource allocation specific to need. Leaders engage in multiple reviews during the school year to determine if any allocations (funding, personnel, or schedule) need adjustment in order to address identified needs. District leaders use strategic planning to ensure long-term goals and sustainability are addressed in annual resource use.
14. District leaders forecast multiple scenarios and conditions to support the long-term viability of district resources, programming, and infrastructure.	14	District leaders develop priority and backup options for program and policy implementation. Backup options identify conditions that would lead to implementation in lieu of the prioritized plan. If constraints are based on resource or capacity, budget options might be developed for executive review and approval.	District leaders identify factors of their system, community perception, or state/federal policy that might influence programs or policies of the district and develop multiple scenarios for implementation that are based upon changes in these factors. District leaders prioritize decisions in advance and project their decisions for resource allocation, programming, or infrastructure needs for their systems based upon external conditions.	District leaders utilize scenario planning to identify trends and patterns in data based upon internal and external factors to the district. District leaders use these scenarios and monitor the contextual factors that would influence which scenario they pursue to determine both strategic and operational decisions. District leaders develop and prioritize plans, including budgets (resource allocation), staffing and contracts (talent management), programming (instruction and/or student support), and infrastructure (facilities, transportation, and resource allocation) for each scenario, using those that best align to the district context.

PRACTICE	IN#	GETTING STARTED	GETTING BETTER	KEEP IMPROVING
<p>15. District and building leaders schedule time and personnel to ensure effective implementation of district systems to best support the district vision and mission.</p>	15a	<p>District leaders identify roles for district level functions and decision-making activities and build responsibilities into job descriptions of such individuals. Similarly, time for program design or planning, pilot implementation, monitoring and data review, and provision of feedback is built into schedules for such individuals. District leaders protect time for these functions.</p>	<p>District leaders build time and responsibilities into schedules and job descriptions, and regularly review outcomes to adjust schedules and responsibilities as needed. District leaders schedule regular time for communication, culture building, and systems implementation tasks with deliberate goals / outcomes.</p>	<p>District leaders focus a majority of time and responsibility around system implementation efforts, and regularly monitor and adjust to ensure effective systems implementation. District leaders engage in regular time studies to identify where time and priorities are focused, and use this information to make decisions about scheduling and job responsibilities. All such functions are connected to support the district vision and mission.</p>
	15b	<p>Selected district staff, including building leaders, teachers, central office staff, and non-instructional staff are included in collaborative team functions devoted to component systems implemented by the district. District and building leaders schedule time for such personnel to participate and coordinate schedules to avoid times of conflicting responsibility.</p>	<p>District leaders establish standing roles and schedules for individual staff members and collaborative teams that include building leaders, teachers, and other instructional and support staff to focus on implementation and monitoring of district systems. Such roles are built into annual job descriptions with clear expectations and defined tasks. Schedules for such work are designed to allow for collaboration and completion of systems-related tasks.</p>	<p>District leaders work with building leaders to establish standing roles and schedules for varying staff to support district and building systems. Roles and responsibilities are reviewed and updated periodically. These functions are scheduled to ensure individual and collaborative completion of systems-specific tasks to support the district mission and vision.</p>

MANAGE DISTRICT SYSTEMS FOR CONTINUOUS IMPROVEMENT

PRACTICE	IN#	GETTING STARTED	GETTING BETTER	KEEP IMPROVING
16. District and building leaders generate, collect, and analyze a variety of data sources to identify needs and priorities for programming and policy aligned to the district vision and mission.	16	District and building leaders review student outcome data for academic and non-academic indicators to determine progress on goals and existing alignment of instruction to support the district vision and mission. The district engages in a needs assessment protocol to identify potential issues in programming, policy, or delivery of instruction based on gaps in outcome data from district goals.	District and building leaders review a variety of student outcome data and operational practices, including instructional and student support data, to identify potential gaps in practices or outcomes. Leaders engage educators and other staff representing critical perspectives to engage in a comprehensive needs assessment to identify possible root cause issues. Leaders use regular monitoring data to adjust practices or programming to existing operational practices to improve short and long-term outcomes for students.	District leaders engage a collaborative team that includes building leaders and educators in a comprehensive needs assessment using a defined protocol, such as the collaborative learning cycle, to look at multiple root-cause issues that might impact district outcomes. District leaders utilize this process to make decisions regarding programming and policies that impact desired outcomes. The district identifies multiple operational practices and short-and long-term outcome indicators that will be monitored using improvement cycles during program implementation.
17. District and building leaders regularly monitor process and outcome indicators of practices and systems to determine actions for people and processes.	17	District and building leaders identify system processes and actions that are needed for implementation, and identify actionable indicators of progress toward outcome goals. Leaders regularly gather and review data on processes and outcomes to determine progress.	District and building leaders identify a range of process and outcome indicators that are connected to district and building goals, and regularly monitor indicator data to inform decision-making around these practices. Leaders identify core outcome indicators of their systems and monitor these regularly to make adjustments or remove operational barriers to implementation.	District and building leaders utilize improvement cycles specific to the actions and processes of each system, and gather implementation and outcome data for review during each cycle. Leaders identify actionable goals with each new cycle, and monitor progress accordingly. Systems are modified with each cycle to address contextual challenges or barriers to implementation.
18. District and building leaders seek critical perspectives to inform decisions and actions to support the district vision and mission.	18	District leaders include representatives from different roles (i.e. instruction, support, and administration) in strategic planning and implementation functions through advisory or decision-making groups. District leaders seek input from district staff regarding strategic decisions.	District and building leaders establish advisory and decision-making groups to address strategic planning and implementation functions for the district. District leaders identify critical perspectives based on role, building assignment, and other considerations and seek to include representatives of each perspective from the various groups.	District and building leaders regularly identify potential perspectives that might be considered for decisions on processes, programs, and systems for the district. Leaders set up advisory or decision-making groups with specific critical perspectives represented and with formalized adjustments to job descriptions and coordinated schedules. Individuals rotate membership in groups on a regular, scheduled basis.

PRACTICE	IN#	GETTING STARTED	GETTING BETTER	KEEP IMPROVING
<p>19. District and building leaders manage the change process for people and processes to ensure that systems are resulting in desired outcomes.</p>	<p>19a</p>	<p>District and building leaders provide advance notice of policy, programming, or other strategy changes in the district, along with rationale and a timeline for the change to take place. Changes that significantly affect individual roles or job positions include a transition plan for those individuals.</p>	<p>District and building leaders utilize change practices, including the use of pilot projects and improvement cycles, as a means of initiating change so all staff understand proposed changes within the district. Leaders forecast policy or program changes for staff well in advance of implementation.</p>	<p>District leaders establish a leadership team devoted to innovation policy and programming changes for the district. This team engages in readiness assessment and exploration, as well as communicating change processes to staff, both to address logistics of processes and to support ease in transition for staff. District changes are forecast well in advance of implementation, including potential transition plans for individuals affected by changes.</p>
	<p>19b</p>	<p>District and building leaders review existing and desired processes for systems to identify those in need of change. New processes incorporate new learning regarding the rationale and operational process for the change. Leaders provide ample time to prepare for the change, and clearly identify desired outcomes of the change.</p>	<p>District and building leaders establish pilot programs or processes to initiate small scale versions of new policies or programs that will eventually scale across buildings or the district. Pilots might be used for a selection process (such as with curriculum materials) or to work through implementation issues when capacity for change is small.</p>	<p>District leaders initiate an individual or team focused on improvement and innovation of processes, programs, and strategies. The team works with groups of educators or other staff who will be involved in pilot or early implementation phases of the program, and works through planning and implementation processes. The team uses improvement cycles to monitor and adjust implementation strategies as needed and determines readiness for scaling of the innovation.</p>