



## Instructional Leadership Routines

**"Effective school leadership is focused on student learning as well as developing and supporting staff in order to achieve equitable outcomes for learners."**

**- Kris Rouleau, McREL International (2021)**

### Why focus on this?

*There are several studies that link the quality of principals and other building leaders to positive outcomes in student learning and achievement. So, what are those leadership qualities that make a positive impact?*

*Most of the research on successful schools that examine connections to leadership practices identify a common focus for leaders. **Leaders in successful schools focus on the quality of learning, teaching, and teacher learning.** In order for leaders to focus on instruction, they need to have an understanding of the instruction taking place in classrooms. Leaders need to know how the day-to-day activities of classrooms are aligned to the instructional vision of the district and how this instruction translates to addressing the curriculum for learners.*

*This is where Instructional Leadership Routines come in. Instructional Leadership Routines integrate three sets of practices into an ongoing, regular protocol for: monitoring instructional practice, reviewing data from this practice to make decisions regarding broad policy or support needs for all staff, and providing detailed feedback and coaching for individual educators.*

**I**nstructional Leadership Routines are not a panacea for any school improvement effort. In fact, taken individually, each of the three categories of practices of these routines, on their own, do not necessarily correlate to any improvement in student outcomes. An experimental study that asked principals to complete feedback checklists for meetings with teachers after observations showed no clear impact on quality of feedback, classroom instructional ratings, or student achievement (Mihaly et al, 2018). Other studies examining principal's use of time for informal classroom walkthroughs actually were a negative predictor of student achievement growth (Grissom, Loeb, and Master, 2013).

**T**hese single action studies illustrate the weaknesses of instructional leadership practices when conducted on their own, ignoring the systems framework a district needs to implement to support instructional practices and curriculum implementation. Instructional Leadership Routines are most powerful when they are

applied **systematically**, engaging teachers and other instructional staff as partners in the review and decision-making around data and in the coaching and feedback process. (Sebastian, Allensworth, and Huang, 2016) and in the broader context of promoting continuous improvement and change in instructional practices (Rouleau, 2021).

**S**ystems, and specifically, the integration of monitoring, problem-solving, and feedback processes between building leaders, instructional coaches and other teacher leaders, and collaborative teacher groups are shown to have positive impacts on teaching and learning, school climate, and teacher collective efficacy relative to student success. Data analysis for instruction, on its own, has no measurable influence on student achievement, yet when leaders systematically collect instructional data and disaggregate data to examine individual differences, the combination of these practices can have a significant effect on student outcomes (Louis et al, 2010).

Leadership capacity in building and district leaders is improved when leaders use observational data and reviews of student work to foster greater coherence and understanding around teaching and learning. “Leadership infuses capacity building into all levels and work of the system” when it brings all of the practices together because it connects multiple systems to the focused direction of the school and builds coherence among all stakeholders in the school (Fullan and Quinn, 2016). The coordinated review of instruction, engagement in decision making and problem solving, and coaching of teachers around instructional practice, all while focusing on changing beliefs and communicating a transformational direction for the school and district allows the connection of vision to a system of improvement and accountability (Finnigan, 2012). Such practices are not only critical in supporting teachers to build their capacity and establish a positive school climate (Sterret, Parker, and Mitzner, 2018); they also engage superintendents and district leadership in prioritizing these efforts to support the needs of the district (Waters and Marzano, 2006).

These leadership practices are demonstrated more broadly in research on policy decisions and practices of districts. Meta-analyses from the use of such practices has been a focus of considerable study. One such study found that “policymakers and administrators could evaluate and redesign the use of time and school schedules to increase opportunities for professional learning and collaboration... including coaching and observations across classrooms,” (Darling-Hammond, Tyler, and Gardner, 2017). Others recommended that administrators establish distributed leadership to review instructional information to establish policy and protocols (Murphy, 2016; National Policy Board for Educational Administration, 2015). In other words, the more systematic the actions of leaders to ensure the integration of instructional observation, analysis of instruction and student outcomes, and use of this information to inform and guide individuals in continuous improvement of instruction, the more likely schools will have improved educator efficacy and student outcomes (Grissom, Egalite, and Lindsay, 2021).

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