

# Solution Tree | Press

## **The High-Performing School: Benchmarking the 10 Indicators of Effectiveness**

*By Mardale Dunsworth and Dawn Billings*

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### **Study Guide**

This study guide is a companion to the book *The High-Performing School: Benchmarking the 10 Indicators of Effectiveness* by Mardale Dunsworth and Dawn Billings. *The High-Performing School* describes the on-site school review process, a method of evaluating a school's performance on 10 Effectiveness Indicators—descriptions of practices that research has shown to be in place in high-performing schools.

This guide is arranged by chapter, enabling readers either to work their way through the entire book or to focus on the specific topics addressed in a particular chapter. It can be used by individuals, small groups, or teams to become familiar with the effectiveness indicators and the research underlying them, to begin considering how their own school's practices compare to

*The High-Performing School: Benchmarking the 10 Indicators of Effectiveness—Study Guide*

those of effective schools, and to decide whether to commit to having an external team visit their school and conduct an on-site review.

We thank you for your interest in this book, and we hope this guide is a useful tool in your efforts to transform your school into a high-performing school.

## **Introduction**

### **Knowing What to Do**

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1. The foundation of the school review process is the 10 effectiveness indicators—the benchmarks against which to compare a school. How did the authors of the book come up with these indicators?
2. List the 10 effectiveness indicators.
3. What are the subdivisions of the effectiveness indicators called?
4. What methods does a review team use to gather information about the state of current practice at a school?
5. Explain how the rubrics enable the review team to evaluate the effectiveness of different areas of a school's program.

## **Chapter 1**

### **Effectiveness Indicator 1: Written Curriculum**

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1. Characteristics 1A, 1B, and 1C all have to do with *curriculum alignment*. What are the three types of alignment that these characteristics describe?
2. As described by Characteristics 1D and 1E, what are two other features of the written curriculum in effective schools?
3. Does your school's written curriculum display the kinds of alignment discussed in this chapter?
4. Are there areas in which your school's curriculum alignment could be improved?

## **Chapter 2**

### **Effectiveness Indicator 2: Instructional Program**

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1. On page 27, in discussing Characteristic 2B, the authors note that “teachers must constantly perform a delicate balancing act” in delivering instruction. What is the balance that effective teachers strive to achieve?
2. Characteristic 2D has to do with breaking instruction down into “learning targets” and communicating those targets clearly to students. What are three crucial pieces of information that students in effective schools know about the learning targets they are expected to reach?
3. What are the two types of knowledge that teachers must possess in order to teach their students effectively?
4. Has this chapter brought to light any aspects of effective instruction that you’d like to focus on more in your own practice?

### Chapter 3

#### Effectiveness Indicator 3: Student Assessment

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1. What are *formative* and *summative* assessments?
2. What are *diagnostic* assessments?
3. Discuss how different items on a multiple-choice test can have different levels of *cognitive demand*—that is, require students to use higher- or lower-order thinking skills in order to answer them.
4. What is meant by *disaggregating data*? What are the benefits of doing so?

## **Chapter 4**

### **Effectiveness Indicator 4: School Leadership**

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1. What is the top priority of effective school leaders?
2. What is meant by *shared leadership*, and what are some areas in which school leaders could make greater use of teacher expertise?
3. What are specific ways that school leaders can promote high-quality professional collaboration among staff members?
4. In addition to conducting their own formal and informal observations of teachers, what are some other ways that school leaders can ensure that teachers receive formative feedback?
5. What are the qualities that you most value in a school leader?

## **Chapter 5**

### **Effectiveness Indicator 5: Strategic Planning**

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1. What is the purpose of a school strategic plan?
2. What is the relationship between student data and the school strategic plan?
3. Before developing the goals of the strategic plan, the planning team must identify problems and possible solutions. What examples did the authors give of the kinds of problems the planning team might want to examine?
4. Once the goals have been set, an action plan for accomplishing the goals must be developed. What kinds of details should the action plan include?
5. How does a school know if it is on the right track toward meeting its goals, and what should it do if it isn't succeeding?
6. Does your school have a strategic plan? If so, were teachers involved in developing it?



## **Chapter 6**

### **Effectiveness Indicator 6: Professional Development**

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1. What is the ultimate goal of professional development?
2. What is the relationship between student data and the planning of professional development?
2. Professional development focuses on deepening teachers' knowledge and skills in what two areas?
3. What is meant by *collaborative, job-embedded* professional development?
4. What is the purpose of professional development that focuses on building teachers' "cultural proficiency"?

## **Chapter 7**

### **Effectiveness Indicator 7: Student Connectedness, Engagement, and Readiness**

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1. How do students' feelings of school connectedness relate to academic success?
2. What social skills can schools teach children to help them form positive relationships with peers?
3. Why is it important for schools to offer students a wide range of extracurricular opportunities?
4. According to the research, what are some strategies that schools can use to reengage students who are at risk of not completing school?
5. What elements need to be in place in order to be sure that students are prepared for a smooth transition to the next grade or level?

## **Chapter 8**

### **Effectiveness Indicator 8: School Environment**

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1. What conditions create a positive school environment?
2. Are you and your students familiar with the procedures described in the school's safety plan?
3. In effective schools, how is responsibility for discipline divided between school administrators and teachers?
4. Do your school's students and their parents know the school's rules and the consequences for breaking those rules?
5. In your school, are the consequences for breaking rules commensurate with the offense, and is discipline perceived as being applied consistently and equitably?
6. What does the research say about the effectiveness of suspension?

## **Chapter 9**

### **Effectiveness Indicator 9: Family and Community Involvement**

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1. What does your school do to make families and the community feel welcome, and what are some additional ideas you picked up from this chapter that your school might adopt?
2. What barriers have you encountered to establishing strong partnerships with families, and what are some strategies for overcoming such barriers?
3. Looking at the rubric for Characteristic 9B (page 176), how good a job would you say your school does of communicating with families?
4. Research shows a connection between family involvement and student learning. What are some strategies that schools can use to engage families in supporting student learning?

## **Chapter 10**

### **Effectiveness Indicator 10: District Support**

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1. How does your district demonstrate that its top priority is the improvement of student learning?
2. Does your district clearly communicate its goals and expectations for instruction, and does it support them with the necessary professional development?
3. Does your district assume the responsibility for the alignment of curriculum, instruction, and assessment?
4. Has your district provided professional development in the use of data for school improvement?

## **Chapter 11**

### **Leading the Way**

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1. If your school decided to go forward with an on-site review, what areas of the program would you most like to see reviewed? Would you prefer a review that included all 10 effectiveness indicators or one that looked at only one or two selected indicators?
2. The members of the review team should have expertise in what three areas?
3. Where does the site coordinator come from, and what is his or her role?
4. How many days does a review team typically spend in the school?
5. What is accomplished at the first meeting between the team leader and the school leadership team?

## **Chapter 12**

### **Preparing for the On-Site Visit**

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1. Who will participate in the interviews and focus groups conducted by the review team?
2. What are teachers asked to do in terms of collecting student work for review?
3. When does the staff first meet the team leader?
4. Who will be asked to complete surveys?
5. What kinds of work space will the school need to set aside for the review team?

## **Chapter 13**

### **Examining Data and Other Documents**

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1. What kinds of data do the review team leader and members study before their time on-site?
2. When members of the review team analyze the student assignments that the teachers have collected and submitted, what two aspects of the work do they evaluate?
3. What are the benefits of looking at data from schools whose demographics are similar to those of the school being reviewed?
4. Why is it important for the review team to analyze the school strategic plan?



## **Chapter 14**

### **The Process: How to Conduct a Research-Based On-Site School Review**

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1. At the pre-review meeting between the team leader and the staff, the interview and focus group sign-up form was circulated. When does the team leader give the staff the final interview schedule?
2. What is meant by *Data Squared*?
3. What are the sources of the information the review team collects to evaluate the school's performance on the effectiveness indicators?
4. Apart from the specific activities scheduled for the first and last days of the review, how do the team members spend the majority of their on-site time during school hours?
5. Besides gathering evidence on specific traits, what does every team member record during every classroom observation?
6. What occasion is used for the review team to deliver its preliminary findings to the school staff?

## **Chapter 15**

### **Communicating Results**

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1. What document is the culmination of the school review?
2. What is meant by *mapping the effectiveness indicators*?
3. What process does the team use to arrive at its statements of the school's strengths?
4. What process does the team use to arrive at its recommendations?
5. What is the format for the final report workshop?

## **Chapter 16**

### **Now What? Strategic Planning and Professional Development**

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1. What is the relationship between the school review and strategic planning?
2. Who is primarily responsible for coordinating the strategic planning process?
3. What is accomplished at the first of the two all-staff strategic planning workshops?
4. What is accomplished at the second all-staff strategic planning workshop?
5. What is the relationship between the strategic plan and professional development?

## **Conclusion**

### **Sustaining and Nurturing a Student-Focused School**

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1. What knowledge does a school gain from an on-site review?
2. What are some ways that schools can use the tools the authors provide to conduct their own periodic assessments of their improvement efforts?