DISTRICT EFFECTIVENESS FRAMEWORK (DEF)

This framework summarizes evidence about the characteristics of "strong" school districts – those districts that are successful at improving the learning of their students. For district senior leadership teams, developing the nine characteristics of strong districts in their organizations should be the immediate goals for their work, with student achievement and well-being as the underlying goals. These nine characteristics enable the district's schools and classrooms to do their school improvement work effectively.

1. **A broadly shared mission, vision and goals founded on aspirational images of the educated person**

   - System-wide focus on achievement (raising the bar, closing the gap, and nurturing student achievement and well-being) to support district-wide improvement efforts in the context of the values held by the community served
   - Mission, vision and goals developed transparently through a strategic planning process and brought alive and sustained through consistent use as decision-making tools and beacons for the future

2. **A coherent instructional guidance system**

   - Curriculum standards and frameworks, instructional practices, professional development emphases and assessment tools focused on achieving the district's mission, vision and goals
   - Collaboration across the system for school improvement purposes, consistency and coherence in priorities and expectations and focused support by system leaders for improvement work in schools
   - School staffs encouraged to be innovative in their efforts to improve practices and to use *focused instruction* [1] to ensure their improvement efforts are addressing the needs of individual students
   - Differentiated support to schools in response to variability in student performance

3. **Deliberate and consistent use of multiple sources of evidence to inform decisions**

   - Effective use of existing research to guide policy making and planning
   - Careful reading of relevant research evidence as the starting point for decisions about what to do to improve student performance
   - Careful use of multiple sources of data about both achievement and improvement strategies for diagnosing weaknesses, setting targets, and monitoring progress
   - Collaborative cultures nourished by networks to stimulate learning of new forms of instructions and support for staff members during implementation

4. **Learning-oriented organizational improvement processes**

   - Coherent approach to improvement based on a small number of key improvement goals consistently pursued over a sustained time period
   - Integration of new initiatives into existing routines and practices ensuring continuity and extension of core values
   - Professional learning communities and networks within and across schools and with other districts to share, assess, and refine improvement efforts and to provide job-embedded, strategically directed professional learning

5. **Job-embedded professional learning for all members of the organization**

   - Professional learning aligned with board and school improvement initiatives differentiated to meet needs of schools, leaders and teachers and aimed at transferring learning into practice
   - Job-embedded professional learning for supervisory officers, principals, and teachers through authentic engagement in solving school and district improvement problems (problems of practice)
   - Close monitoring of progress and staff held accountable for applying their learning

6. **Budgets, structures, time and personnel policies/procedures aligned with the district's mission, vision and goals**

   - Allocation of resources aligned with district focus on improving instruction and student achievement
   - Resources used to help close achievement gaps by ensuring that struggling students have better access to supports (financial resources, high quality teachers and successful peer models)

7. **A comprehensive approach to leadership development**

   - School leader development used as a high leverage strategy due to its potential to influence large numbers of teachers
   - Well developed and implemented performance appraisal procedures for school leaders and regular feedback to principals about their leadership practices and improvement efforts
   - Creation of large pools of well-qualified potential school and system leaders and on-the-job support for them once in leadership roles
   - Orderly leadership succession and placement of leaders in schools based primarily on the needs or challenges faced by schools
   - Priority focus on developing subsets of the personal leadership resources and leadership practices based on local circumstances at particular times

8. **A policy-oriented board of trustees**

   - Board of trustees focused on strategic planning and ensuring district mission and vision for student achievement and well-being drive the district's improvement efforts
   - Board of trustees help to create productive relationships in an engaging, supportive climate of excellence
   - Board of trustees holds the director accountable for improving teaching and learning in the system
   - Board members respect decisions reached by the board as a whole

9. **Productive working relationships with staff and stakeholders**

   - Regular communication through the system nurtured by structures that encourage strong relationships and collaborative work based on a shared vision for student learning and well-being among staff, principals, system leaders, parents, community groups, trustees and ministry

[1] Focused approaches to instruction are explicitly goal-directed and transparent about what students are intended to accomplish. There is constant monitoring by the teacher of what students are doing and direct interventions by the teacher to help ensure that students are actively engaged in meaningful learning as much as possible, including careful control over the timing and pace of instruction.