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RESEARCH REPORT

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The School Performance Review Rubric: A Facilitator's Guide

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The School Performance Review Rubric: A Facilitator's Guide

INTRODUCTION

In 2007, the Office of the Superintendent of Public Instruction (OSPI) published the first edition of its School Performance Descriptor Rubric (called the SPR Rubric in this report) as a tool to provide guidance and assistance to School Performance Review Teams. These teams examined schools to provide an external review, identifying how well the school is aligned with OSPI's research-based Nine Characteristics of High Performing Schools (OSPI, 2007), the High Schools We Need: Improving an American Institution (OSPI, 2006), and Washington State's Alternative High School Initiative (The BERC Group, 2008).

In 2009, OSPI contracted with The BERC Group to pilot and assess the usefulness and effectiveness of the SPR Rubric in a series of School and Classroom Practices Studies produced for the OSPI Summit District Improvement Initiative. The BERC Group first piloted the Rubric in the spring of 2009, revised it extensively, and piloted it again in the fall of 2009. A major purpose for the piloting process was to test both the original and revised SPR Rubric and data collection process to see how well both the instrument and the process worked in a one-day site visit configuration. As described in Appendix A, BERC researchers found the revised SPR Rubric and protocols to be more effective and the results of the process more reliable than the original design. Based on extensive field-testing of the rubric and conversations about the scoring process, the revised SPR Rubric and the data collection and reporting process are now ready to move into general use by both external and internal reviewers. Appendix A includes more information about the rubrics and the revisions.

The purpose of the performance reviews is to provide school staff members with baseline information that will help them review and modify their school improvement plan. In addition, information from the school reviews can, where applicable, inform decisions about federal intervention models schools are considering. As of January 2010, OSPI requires that any school applying for federal intervention funding must complete a school review as part of the application process.

This Facilitator's Guide will help external reviewers and program evaluators use the rubric and associated materials in a coherent and effective review process. The Facilitator's Guide is geared primarily toward external reviewers but can easily be used by school personnel. We include a section in the guide detailing how this can be done. We believe schools that undertake this process with fidelity and commitment will be able to target their improvement efforts in increasingly effective ways to enhance student learning for all students.

THE SCHOOL PERFORMANCE REVIEW PROCESS

Overview of the Process

The School Performance Review process has three components: a one-day school site visit and intensive data collection, a process of scoring the school on the SPR Rubric and writing the report, and a presentation of data back to a school in a reflective meeting format.

During the school site visit, teams of two to seven researchers visit a school and conduct interviews, focus groups, and classroom observations concurrently. Researchers use protocols for focus groups with students, teachers, and parents and for interviews with administrators. Interviews and focus groups are documented real-time. In addition, every classroom in the school, with the exception of physical education and high impact special education classes, is observed for 30 minutes using the STAR Classroom Observation Protocol™. Data from the STAR Protocol are used to complete sections of the rubric concerning rigorous teaching and learning, instruction, and personalized learning environment. Documents such as the school improvement plan, school profile data, school handbook, and results from district surveys are also collected.

After every school visit, each member of the site-visit team scores the school based on the SPR Rubric -External Review (see Appendix B). Once the individual rubrics are completed, the research team for each school calibrates their rubric scores and comes to agreement on a final consensus score for each rubric item. Since each member of the team may have been in different classrooms and some may only have conducted interviews and focus groups and not been in classrooms, final score discussions create an opportunity to compile and discuss all of the data collected at a particular school.

Each school is assigned a lead researcher who synthesizes the SPR Rubric scores and the STAR Classroom Observation Protocol observations and, with team input, writes a report on the findings. These reports highlight school strengths and/or weaknesses within each of the Nine Characteristics of High Performing Schools and discuss practices and policies at the school level that may present barriers to implementation of school improvement or intervention plans.

Once the School and Classroom Practices Study (SCPS) report has been written, the lead researcher presents the team's findings to the individual schools as formative feedback. Ideally, this presentation is done in the form of a reflective meeting that offers school administrators and staff members the opportunity to ask questions, to clarify understanding, and to begin thinking about ways to incorporate the findings into their planning.

Data Collection - The School Visit

Scheduling the school visit is an important part of the process. Although researchers attempt to be as unobtrusive as possible, the process of interviewing and gathering staff for focus groups, as well as opening up all classrooms for observation, is inherently disruptive. To ensure enough data are collected in a day to adequately and accurately reflect the school's strengths and challenges, researchers must talk to many different people throughout the day. This creates work for school

administrators and staff but, with clear direction and enough lead time, the visits can run smoothly and successfully.

The Process:

1) ***Contact schools well in advance*** to set up the date for the school visit. Try to make sure administrators and counselors will be present that day so they can be interviewed.

2) ***Create a Letter*** to prepare the school for the external review visit (see Appendix C). The letter should describe briefly and clearly the purpose of the visit, what will occur during the visit, who will be involved, and how the data will be reported back to the school. School administrators are responsible for contacting all stakeholders and setting up the interviews and focus groups for the day. It is helpful to include a sample interview/focus group schedule in your letter that lists who reviewers need to talk to and for how long. Administrators can adapt the sample to their particular situation. Figure 1 below shows a sample schedule that you might include. *If at all possible, ask the school to send you the interview schedule before the day of the visit, so the review team can prepare for the day. Call or email the school contact at least two days in advance to confirm the team's visit.*

Figure 1. **Sample Interview/Focus Group Schedule.**

Interviews and Focus Group Schedule*	
Time (Please Complete this Section)	Participants
Before School	School Leadership Team (45 Minutes)
	Principal and Assistant Principals (1 hour)
	Parents (45 Minutes)
	Counselors (45 minutes)
During Lunch	Student Volunteers, representing grades 4 or above (approximately 6 to 8 students) (45 minutes)
	Classified Staff (45 minutes)
	Instructional Staff (45 minutes)
After School	Instructional Staff (45 minutes)

*If it is easier or more efficient to arrange the day in a different way, please do so. The length of time for each interview/focus group listed here is preferred but can be adjusted.
*It is important that reviewers talk to each of the stakeholder groups. It is essential to speak with at least two groups of instructional staff.

3) ***Arrive early and be flexible***. Schools are collections of human beings. On any given day there are hundreds of variables that can interfere with even the best laid plans. It is important for external reviewers to come prepared to adjust to outside circumstances and still do the best they can to collect as much data as possible. Recognize that even in the best of circumstances, patience and persistence will help tremendously.

4) ***Divide into teams***. Some reviewers will conduct classroom observations and sit in on interviews/focus groups when time permits. Other reviewers will conduct interviews and focus groups and, when possible, conduct a few classroom observations. It helps if the team is clear about who will be doing what before arriving at the school. *Each school review team should appoint a Lead who will take responsibility for making sure all data collection is completed*.

5) ***Classroom Observation Protocol.*** Reviewers conducting classroom observations use the STAR Classroom Observation Protocol, a research-based instrument designed to measure the degree to which Powerful Teaching and Learning™ is present during the classroom observation period. Reviewers observe a classroom for thirty minutes and complete a rubric for each class observed. It is essential that the reviewers are well trained and calibrated on the Protocol. Scores are combined into a school score, and a descriptive report is written. *Each school review team should appoint two to three members to collect all of the observation rubrics and write the descriptive report. (s*ee Appendix D for sample STAR Classroom Study Report[1]

6) ***Interview/Focus Group Protocols.*** To ensure all researchers are gathering data that will address the purpose of the school review and specific rubric items, interview and focus group protocols have been developed for each of the stakeholder groups to be interviewed (administrators, counselors, teachers, students, parents/community members). These protocols are attached in Appendix E. You should note it is unlikely that you will be able to get to every question given the time constraints. The protocols are organized in order with the most important questions for that particular stakeholder group asked first, so start at the beginning and work your way down the list. Most sections of the protocols will have been covered by at least one stakeholder group by the end of the day.

   Reviewers conducting focus groups should remember the following tips for facilitating such groups:

   - Encourage participants to talk to each other, not just to you.
   - Remind participants that the object of the discussion is to provide you with different perspectives, not to come to consensus. Everyone does not have to agree and it they do not, they should say so.
   - If one person seems to be dominating the conversation, try to expand the discussion by asking others directly for their input on the question.

[1] For the purposes of this report, we have used the STAR Classroom Observation Protocol. However, external and internal reviewers can use the protocol and method of their choice for collecting classroom observation data. It is most important the team is trained and is well calibrated, ensuring the data is reliable and valid.

It is very important when documenting focus groups and interviews that reviewers take down as much of what participants say as verbatim as possible. *Try not to interpret or summarize the data at this point, just get down exactly what people are saying as best you can.*

7) ***Thank you notes.*** After the visit, remember to thank the school administrators and staff for their time and effort on behalf of the visit. Thank you notes or emails are appreciated and help build cordial relationships with the school.

Data Analysis – Writing the Report

When the data collection process at the school is complete, reviewers read through the interview/focus group data and the classroom observation data, and complete the **rubric scoring sheet** (Appendix F), assigning a score for each item of the rubric and adding comments or rationales for their score in the appropriate section. Each reviewer scores the school separately. The Lead reviewer combines the individual scores into a final group score for the school and sends these back to the review team for comment and discussion. Reviewers should arrive at consensus on the scores since only one score for each rubric item will be included in the report to the school. *Discussion at this point in the process can be quite fruitful, challenging reviewers to see beyond their own impressions and pointing out areas of strength and challenge at the school that the Lead reviewer can note for inclusion in the report.*

Once the school has been scored on the SPR Rubric, the Lead reviewer writes a **School and Classroom Practices Study report** (see sample report in Appendix G) that briefly describes the school's strengths and challenges in each area of the rubric, essentially highlighting the school's capacity in each of the Nine Characteristics of High Performing Schools. The report explains the rationale for each of the scores, discusses barriers to implementing improvement plans at the school, and ends with a summary and recommendations. The tone of these reports should be friendly and objective, avoiding jargon and overly complicated educational terminology. Writers should refrain from making value judgments but should describe differing perspectives where they arise. Quotes from participants should be used to illustrate points and to provide "voice" and interest in the report. A quote should only be used if it represents a common and recurring theme of the review.

Reporting Back to the School – Reflective Meetings

The final and very important step in the school review process is the reflective meeting. Once the School and Classroom Practices Study and the Classroom Observation Study are completed for a school, external reviewers return to the school to present the findings and assist school administrators and staff in thinking about how they will use this data to move forward with their school improvement plans. Ideally, these meetings include the principal and the school leadership team and could also include staff and other stakeholders.

During the reflective meeting, the Lead reviewer goes over the data collection process with the participants, discusses the SPR Rubric and how it was used to score the school, reviews the school specific data, and answers questions. Time is set aside for participants to work in small groups to review their school data and begin forming an action plan. The meeting ends with a group discussion about how participants can use the review data in their work. *Reflective meetings help to*

ensure that participants actively engage with the school review data and have an opportunity to respond to both the data and the review team. In this way, everyone, reviewers and participants alike, learns from the experience. (A sample PowerPoint presentation for a reflective meeting is included in Appendix H.)

School Review Process for Internal Reviewers (School Personnel)

Although the SPR Rubric was designed primarily as a tool to assist external School Performance Review Teams, OSPI believes the rubric and the school review process described here can be used by schools themselves to conduct in-house performance reviews or to provide benchmarks by which a school can measure its alignment with state standards. Most of the processes described above apply equally to internal reviewers with a few changes.

Data collection. For internal reviewers, there is obviously no need to schedule a school visit, although the school may want to use a waiver day to walk through the review process. Rather than interviews and focus groups, individual staff members can score themselves and their school according to the rubric, being very careful to list evidence for each score. For internal school reviews, it may be more helpful to use the SPR Rubric Internal Review in Appendix I, which includes more specifically itemized indicators that external reviewers cannot attend to in one day, but which school personnel may be able to answer easily.

When conducting the self-assessment, it is helpful to have access to additional data. The additional data may include, but is not limited to, achievement data, surveys, classroom observation or classroom walk-through data, graduation rates, and other outcome data. If this data is not available, it will helpful to acquire this prior to doing the self-assessment.

If trust is a potential issue in the building, it may be important to undergo this process with an external reviewer prior to conducting an internal review. In this way, school personnel can establish a baseline and can become familiar with the process.

Data analysis. Once individual school staff have given themselves and their school a rubric score for each item, staff and administrators should come together to discuss their findings and compare their individual rubric scores for the school. Items where rubric scores differ widely may indicate areas in need of focused attention of some kind. If rubric scores are widely divergent in most categories, then work needs to be done to focus attention and effort on developing clear and shared goals for the school to move toward. Working toward agreement on a consensus score for the school on each rubric item will help staff to begin that process.

Reporting Back. Once the school staff has come to agreement on a consensus rubric score for each item, staff members can begin reviewing the data they collected and developing an action plan for incorporating what they have learned into their work. The following section outlines in more detail how the data from these school reviews can be used.

USING THE SCHOOL REVIEW DATA

Unlike test scores and survey data, the qualitative nature of the school review offers school administrators and staff members a deeper glimpse into underlying assumptions, attitudes, and beliefs that determine the behavior of the school's stakeholder groups and can often block school improvement initiatives. Because it is aligned with district and state goals for improving student achievement and with research on best practices, the school review data for each school can be very useful in setting expectations for what kinds of structures, policies, and practices should be in place in order to improve student achievement for all students. The data show schools very clearly where they are falling short and, because the process is based on a rubric, school personnel can see that there is a continuum and a path they can follow toward improvement. To use the school review data well, it needs to be incorporated into the school's systems and become part of an accountability structure. Here are some ways to do that:

1) ***Findings from the school review process should drive school improvement planning***. The SMART Goal Worksheet (see Appendix J) offers a framework school personnel can use to consider the gap between their present reality (as described by the school review process and other school assessment documents) and their school improvement goals. School staff should work in teams (e.g. grouped by grade level, content area, improvement plan committees or whatever is appropriate for planning) to complete the worksheet and create action steps with clearly defined responsibilities, timelines, and evidence of effectiveness. Discussions of findings should include a comparison of the data with the school improvement plan to see if benchmarks are being met and whether the plan has steps in place to address the challenges highlighted by the school review. SMART goals may be transferred to or from the school improvement plan to better link these documents.

2) ***Findings from the school review should inform school decisions about appropriate intervention models***. For schools being asked to choose a federal intervention program, the school review process provides important data on the capacity of the school and its staff to make the changes required in a particular intervention model. OSPI now requires a school review as part of the school application for federal intervention model funding.

3) ***School coaches should use the school review findings to focus their coaching work.*** Within their specific content focus, school coaches (literacy, reading, math) can use the school review data to concentrate their efforts in specific areas in need of improvement at the school. In referencing and using the rubric as part of their coaching strategies, coaches can assist teachers and administrators to understand and incorporate new systems, structures, and policies that will move the school to higher rubric scores by increasing student learning. Ongoing reinforcement of rubric elements through coaching is a powerful force for change.

4) ***Findings from the school review can highlight alignment between school and district improvement plans.*** Accountability for school improvement rests primarily with the school staff but can be supported or seriously hindered by actions at the district level. As schools become clearer about their own areas of challenge, they may also see areas where decisions made at the central office are constraining them. School administrators can use the school review findings to initiate conversations with district administrators around these issues.

CONCLUSION

The school review process as described here is intensive. To accomplish it in one day and to collect enough data to give reviewers an accurate sense of a school's strengths and challenges requires focus and dedication. For internal reviewers especially, this process may be difficult because it is so easy to get pulled away for other things during a school day and because relationships with colleagues make it difficult sometimes to see with new eyes. We believe that if reviewers approach the review process remembering that the goal is not to proclaim right and wrong but rather to develop new critical perspectives on school practices, then the learning can be significant for everyone involved. It is not until we make our work visible, that it can be changed. The school review process offers schools an opportunity to see themselves with new eyes, reflect on what they have seen, and make informed decisions that can lead to the changes we all want to see in student achievement. We hope that this facilitator's guide has provided you with the tools you need to benefit from the process and continue the good work of improving education for all students.

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APPENDIX A – SUMMARY OF RUBRIC REVISION AND PILOT REVIEW PROCESS

From April to June 2009, BERC Group personnel collected data in 37 schools in three districts participating in the Summit District Improvement Initiative (Clover Park, Sunnyside, and Tukwila). Although these three districts were all in improvement, individual schools within the districts represented a range of low, middle, and high-performing schools, offering a mixed sample with which to test the rubric.

After the initial pilot process, both the SPR Rubric and the related interview and focus group protocols were revised during the summer of 2009 (see BERC 2009 for that report) and the revised rubric and protocols were piloted in a fourth district, Tacoma (57 schools), to determine whether the changes increased the usefulness and effectiveness of the tool. Analysis of the data from the Tacoma visits shows reviewers found the process to be much more efficient and less cumbersome than during the initial pilot phase. In the initial report on the rubric, we found that scoring the rubric took one to five hours per school to complete the individual rubrics and an additional two to five hours per school to complete the group calibration. During the second pilot phase, individual scoring per school took approximately thirty minutes to an hour per school and group calibrations took perhaps fifteen to thirty minutes in total.

BERC researchers performed analyses of the data from the second pilot phase (see charts following this description), including the percent of responses missing for each rubric item and the percent of teams who agreed on a rubric rating. Although the rubric and the protocols had been extensively rewritten for the second pilot phase, the process used to collect data and to score the rubric was the same. Data was collected by research teams consisting of two to seven researchers, based on the size of the school. For each visit, individual researchers were responsible for specific focus groups, interviews, and classroom observations. A single researcher conducted some activities while other activities had multiple researchers present. Thus, each researcher had both shared and individual experiences at the school. Following the site visit, each researcher scored the rubric based on his or her exposure to focus groups, interviews, and classrooms. One hundred and eighty-eight rubrics were completed across the fifty-seven schools visited. This data comes from the rubrics completed by individual raters, before they calibrated their findings and settled on a consensus score.

In Appendix A, we show the percent of responses missing for each item on 188 scored rubrics. We calculated this percent across all raters and separately for the lead rater who participated in most of the focus groups and interviews and observed classes and thus presumably had the most information about the school. As expected, responses missing from the lead rater were less than those of all raters. For fifteen of the nineteen items, there were no missing responses from lead raters. The four items with missing responses from lead raters all related to teaching and instruction, items that lead raters would not have seen if they did not have time to observe any classroom instruction. For all raters, most of the percent missing falls between 5% and 48% percent for the individual rubric items. The items with the highest number of responses missing from all raters were those that would have been covered in interviews and focus groups, rather than classroom observations. Since most of the team members at a particular school conducted classroom observations throughout the day, they would not necessarily have had time to listen to the interviews and thus would not have been able to rate some of the rubric items.

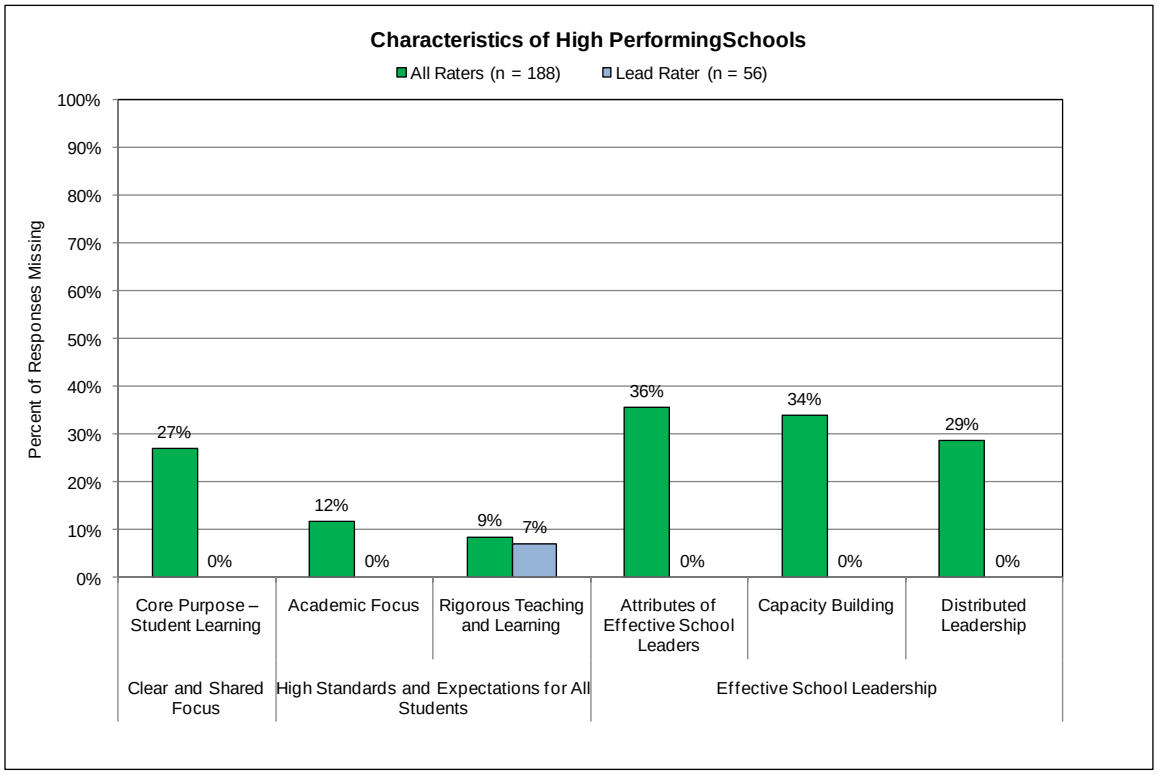
Taken together, these data show us that the revised rubric and protocols allow reviewers to address all areas of the rubric within the one-day time frame with over half of the review team able to score most items.

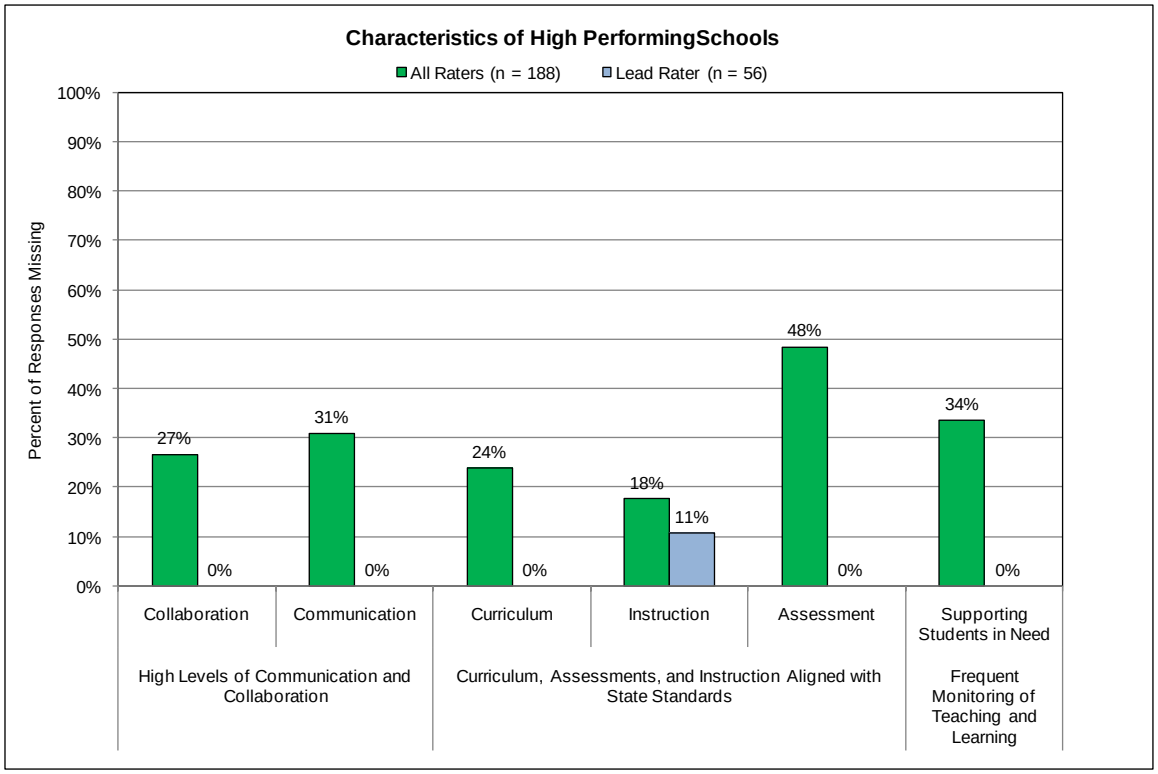
Because of the number of missing responses and the small size of the sample (n=57), it was not possible to statistically analyze inter-rater reliability with any degree of confidence. As an alternative however, researchers performed an analysis to determine the extent to which all research team members gave a school the same rating on a particular rubric item. Appendix B displays the percentage of schools for which all raters were in agreement for a particular item. These percentages were calculated for each item only when at least two raters responded.

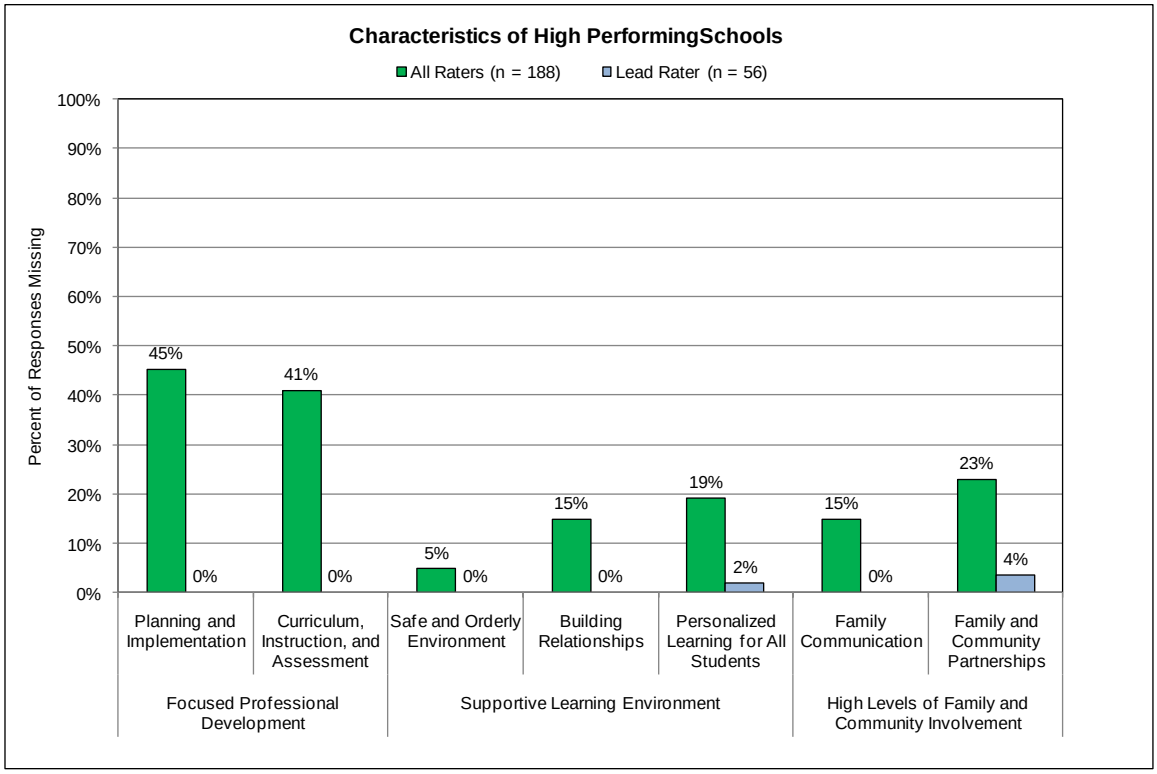
Based on the data presented in Appendix B, we found that there was much less variability in individual scoring of the rubric items than in the initial pilot phase. Agreement among teams ranged between 48% and 66%, a much narrower range than the 15% to 100% range in the initial pilot phase. On average, approximately half of the teams scored schools exactly the same on the majority of rubric items. Given that each reviewer saw slightly different aspects of the school and may or may not have heard all of the interviews and focus groups, the variability here is to be expected and does not seem to indicate major difficulties with the rubric or protocols.

A major purpose for the pilot process was to test both the original and revised SPR Rubric and process to see how well both the instrument and the process worked in a one-day site visit configuration. As described throughout this section, BERC researchers found the revised SPR Rubric and protocols to be much more effective and the results of the process much more reliable than the original design. Based on extensive field-testing of the rubric and conversations about the scoring process, we believe that the revised SPR Rubric and the data collection and reporting process are now ready to move out of the pilot phase and into general use by both external and internal reviewers. The next sections of this report offer a description of the data collection and reporting process that should be followed when using the SPR Rubric and related protocols.

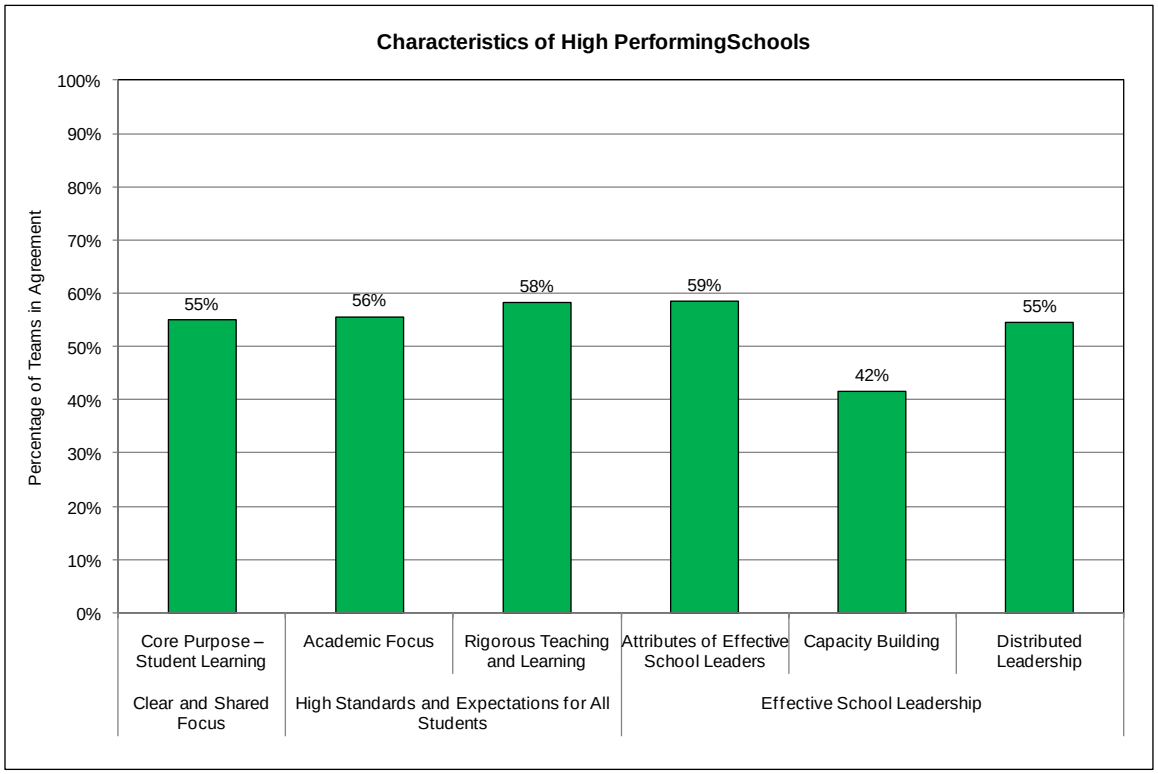
RUBRIC ANALYSIS PERCENT OF RESPONSES MISSING

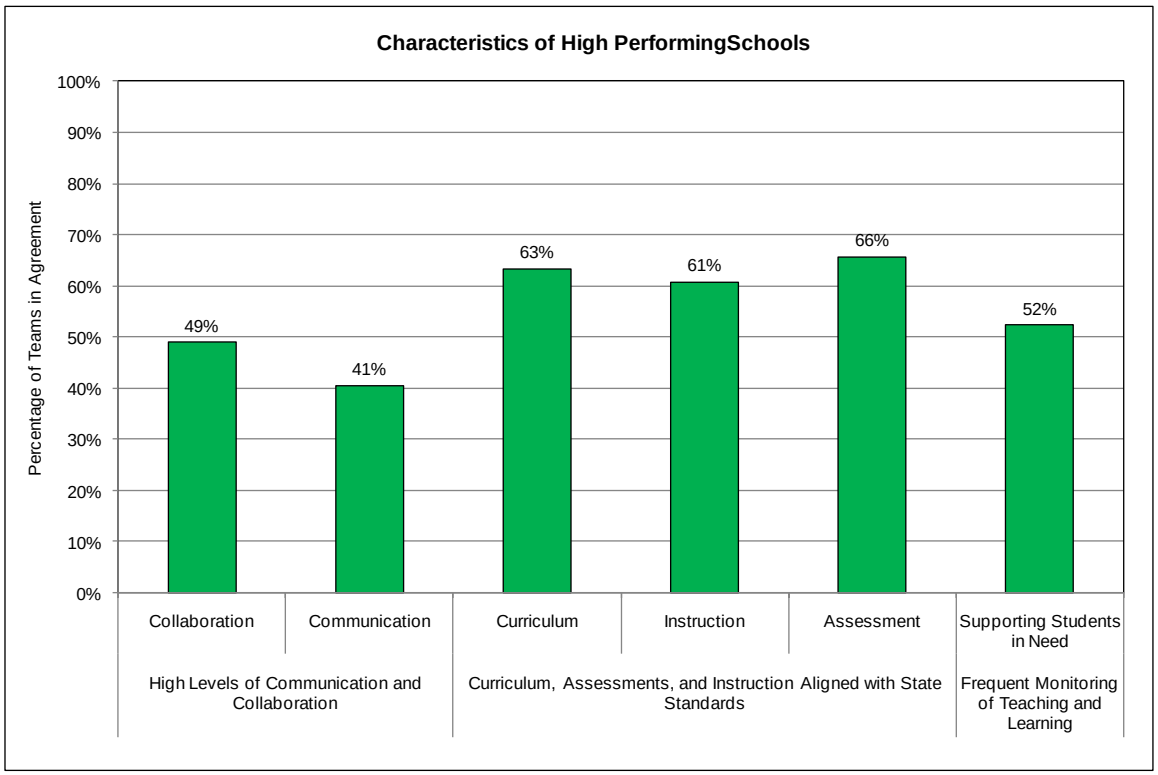


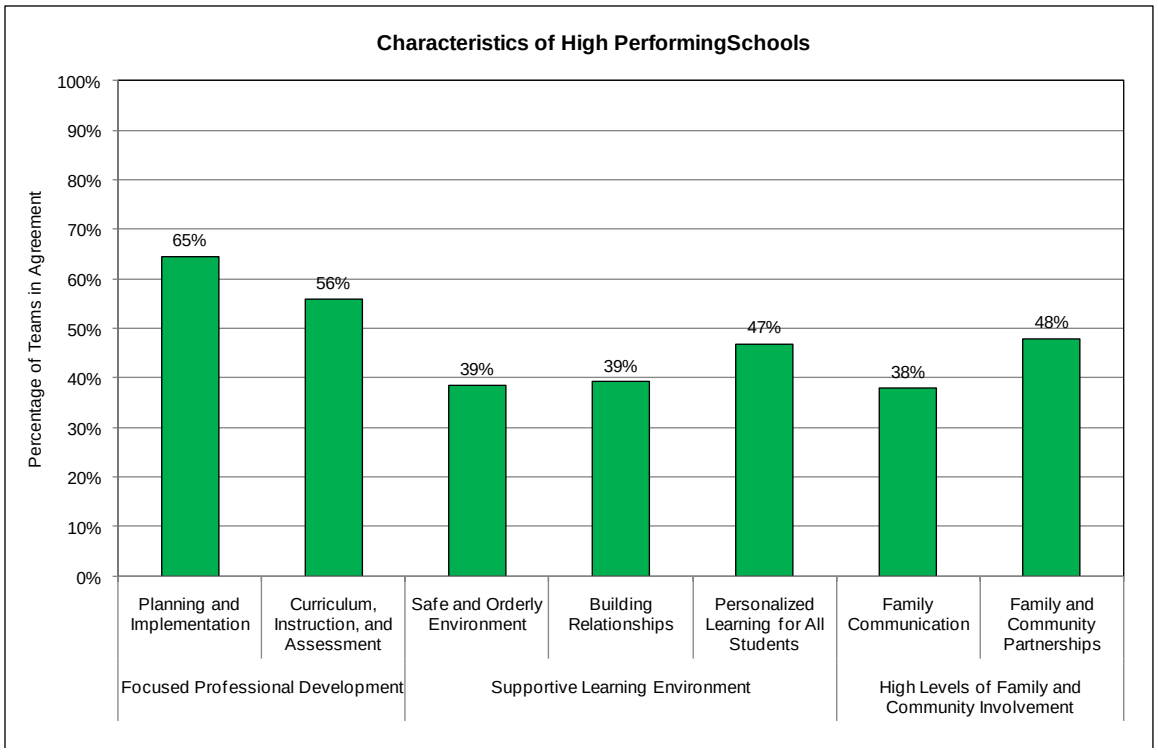



Characteristics of High PerformingSchools
All Raters (n = 188)
Lead Rater (n = 56)
Percent of Responses Missing
100%
90%
80%
70%
60%
50%
40%
30%
20%
10%
0%
45%
0%
41%
0%
5%
0%
15%
0%
19%
2%
15%
0%
23%
4%
Planning and Implementation
Curriculum, Instruction, and Assessment
Safe and Orderly Environment
Building Relationships
Personalized Learning for All Students
Family Communication
Family and Community Partnerships
Focused Professional Development
Supportive Learning Environment
High Levels of Family and Community Involvement

RUBRIC ANALYSIS PERCENT OF TEAMS IN AGREEMENT






Characteristics of High PerformingSchools
Percentage of Teams in Agreement
100%
90%
80%
70%
60%
50%
40%
30%
20%
10%
0%
65%
56%
39%
39%
47%
38%
48%
Planning and Implementation
Curriculum, Instruction, and Assessment
Safe and Orderly Environment
Building Relationships
Personalized Learning for All Students
Family Communication
Family and Community Partnerships
Focused Professional Development
Supportive Learning Environment
High Levels of Family and Community Involvement

APPENDIX B – SPR RUBRIC EXTERNAL REVIEW

APPENDIX C – SAMPLE LETTER

THE BERC GROUP

BAKER ■ EVALUATION ■ RESEARCH ■ CONSULTING

OSPI School Improvement Grant Opportunities
School and Classroom Practices Study

[Date]

Dear [Building Principal],

As you know, The BERC Group will be conducting a School and Classroom Practices Study (SCPS) in your school within the next few weeks. These one day school review visits are designed to identify focus areas for improvement and to examine how closely your school is aligned with OSPI's research-based Nine Characteristics of High Performing Schools. We are sending you this letter to outline the process for the visit and to ask for your assistance in organizing the day.

On the day of our visit, a team of BERC researchers (two to eight people depending on the size of your school) will conduct interviews, focus groups, and classroom observations concurrently throughout the day. Researchers will also collect school documents. Specific details about each of these practices are included below. We will need your help in setting up and scheduling the interviews and focus groups. A sample schedule is also provided at the end of this letter.

School Level Data Collection

Interviews and Focus Groups

Throughout the day of our visit, we will conduct formal and informal interviews and focus groups with administrators, the school leadership team, counselors, teachers, students, parents and community members, and classified staff. To limit the impact on the classroom, we will not be pulling teachers out of their classrooms but instead, suggest that we meet with teachers during prep periods, at lunch, and/or before and after school. *We have attached a sample interview/focus group schedule at the end of this letter. Please adjust the schedule to meet the needs of your staff and school. Send us the finalized schedule prior to our visit, so we can plan our day accordingly.*

Document Collection

To ensure a greater understanding of your school, and to help us organize our time most efficiently and effectively, we will need to collect school documents. *On the day of the visit, please have a copy of your master schedule, bell schedule, school/campus map, school improvement plan, parent/student handbook, and course catalog, ready for us if available.* Please feel free to include additional artifacts that will help us learn more about your school such as newsletters, activity schedules, or examples of Student Learning Plans and High School and Beyond Plans. We may ask for additional documents as they are referenced in the interviews and focus groups.

In addition to the above documents, we will work with your school district to access data such as district climate surveys, school effectiveness surveys, and other school level information.

Classroom Level Data Collection

The purpose of the observation study is to determine the nature of the classroom instruction that is taking place throughout the school. Typically, we observe every classroom except for physical education, music, and high impact special education classes. We usually do not observe classes that are testing.

What is involved in the classroom observations?

A BERC researcher will visit each classroom in your school for 25 to 30 minutes. We want to observe "typical" lessons, so teachers should not do any special preparation for the observations. Because we schedule the observations after we arrive at the school, teachers will not necessarily know what time of the day the observations will occur in any given classroom. *You and your staff are not responsible for scheduling the classroom observations.*

What kind of data will be collected?

Observers will be using the STAR Classroom Observation Protocol that focuses on measuring the extent to which Powerful Teaching and Learning™ is present during the observation period. The protocol will be made available to participants after the visit.

How will the data be reported?

The results of the Classroom Practices Study will be made available to participants only in descriptive form at the aggregate school level. Individual teacher results will **NOT** be shared. If there are questions from teachers about how these findings will be reported and used, please assure them of the following:

> **No individual classroom observation results will be reported or available to anyone within the school, within the district, or external to the district.**

Reporting the Study Results

Within a week of our visit, you will receive a SCPS report on your school and classroom practices, detailing our findings and highlighting your school's capacity to improve in each of the Nine Characteristics of High Performing Schools. The report will discuss barriers to implementing improvement plans at your school and offer recommendations. BERC Group researchers will review your school's data with you, your administrative team, and staff and assist you in thinking about how you will use this data to move forward with your school improvement grant application.

Where applicable, the school district will receive a report with aggregated data from all schools in the district. This data will be used to inform district improvement planning.

What happens next?

After the date for the school review visit is confirmed, please work with your school staff to arrange interviews and focus groups with school staff and stakeholders according to the sample schedule attached. *Please send us a finalized schedule, indentifying the times for the interviews and focus groups. The schedule should be sent to* [name] and [name].

Thank you for your help in conducting this component of the Summit District Improvement Initiative. Please contact me if you have any questions about the project.

Sincerely,

[name]

[include sample schedule here]

APPENDIX D – SAMPLE STAR CLASSROOM STUDY REPORT

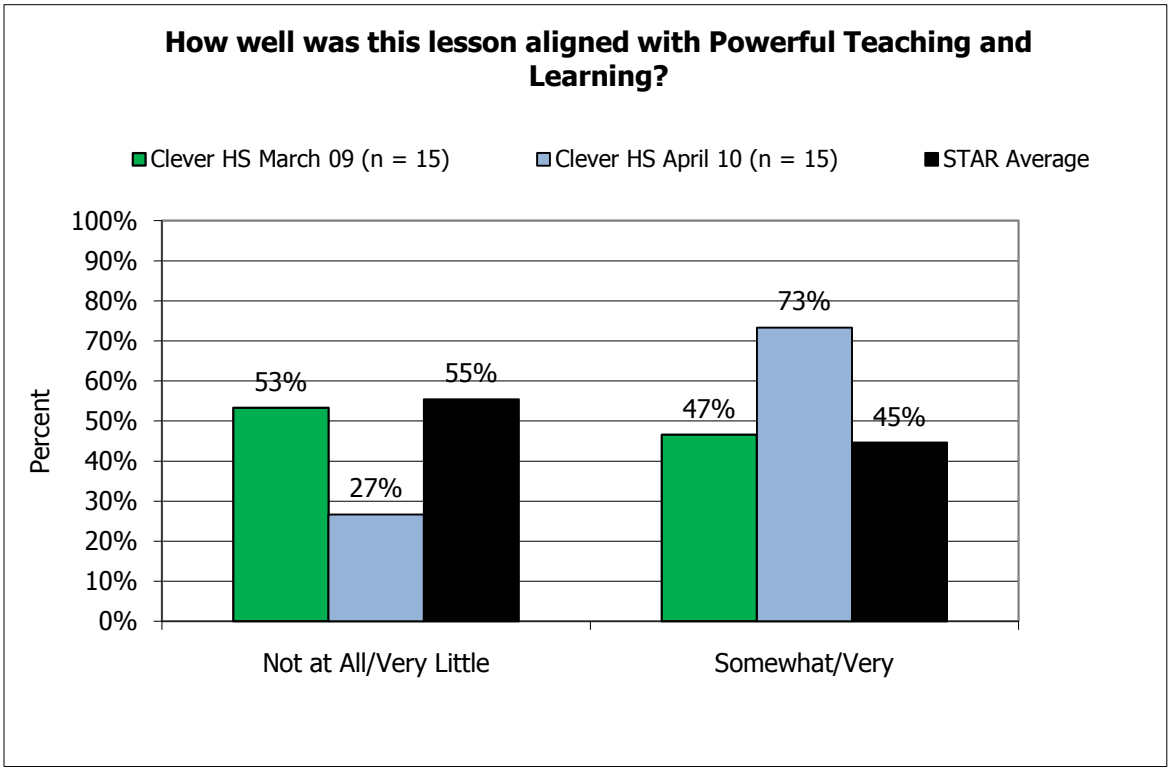
STAR Classroom Observation Study

Introduction

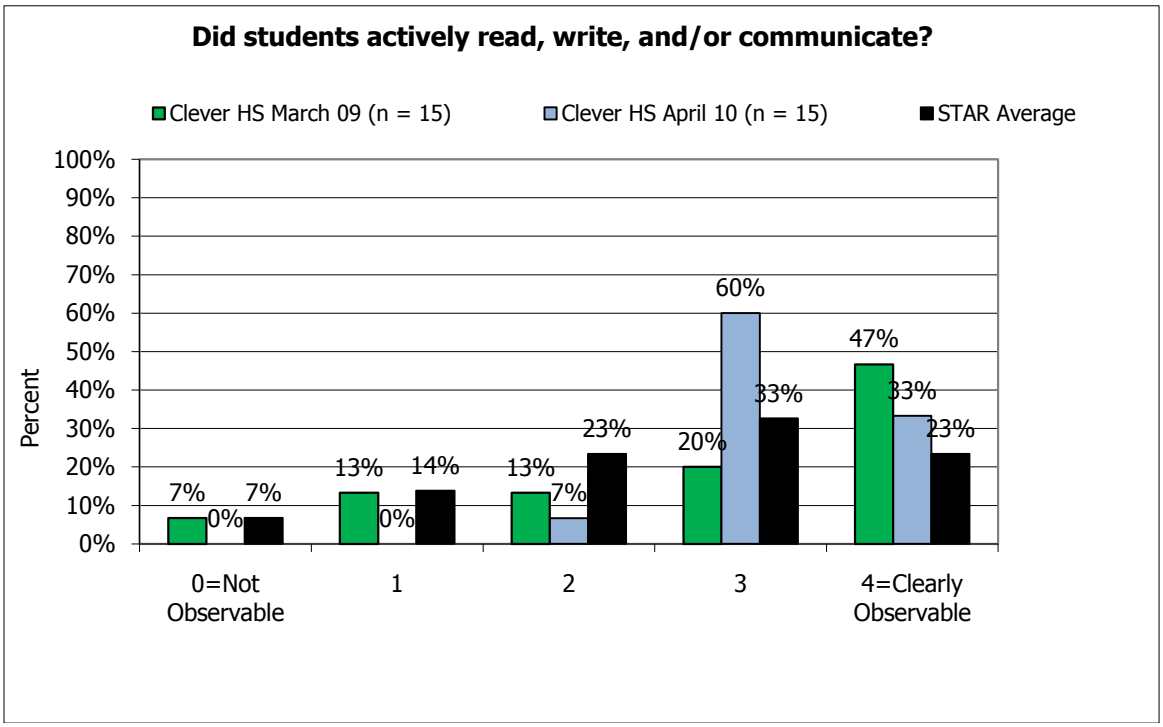
The STAR Classroom Observation Protocol™ is a research-based instrument designed to measure the degree to which Powerful Teaching and Learning™ is present during a classroom observation. As part of the design of the STAR Protocol, only the most significant and basic indicators are used to determine the presence of Powerful Teaching and Learning™. Thus, the STAR protocol allows for ease of use with any classroom observation and aligns with the educational improvement goals and standards for effective instruction. The STAR protocol helps participants view Powerful Teaching and Learning™ through the lens of 5 Essential Components and 15 Indicators.

The goal of this data collection is to determine the extent to which general instructional practices throughout the school align with Powerful Teaching and Learning™. Findings within this report highlight Clever High School's STAR classroom observation results in comparison to the 2007 STAR Average and past observation results. The results for the Essential Components are shown on pages 2 through 4, and the results for the Indicators are on page 5. A summary and recommendations are included at the end of the report.

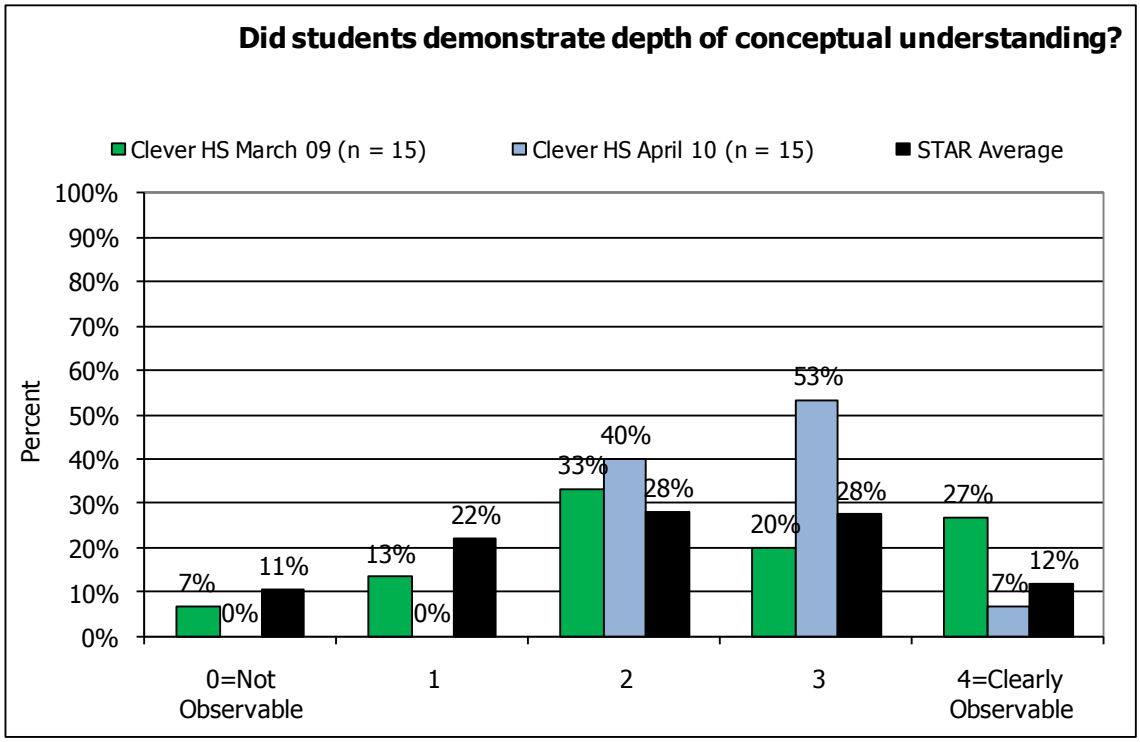
Overall Results



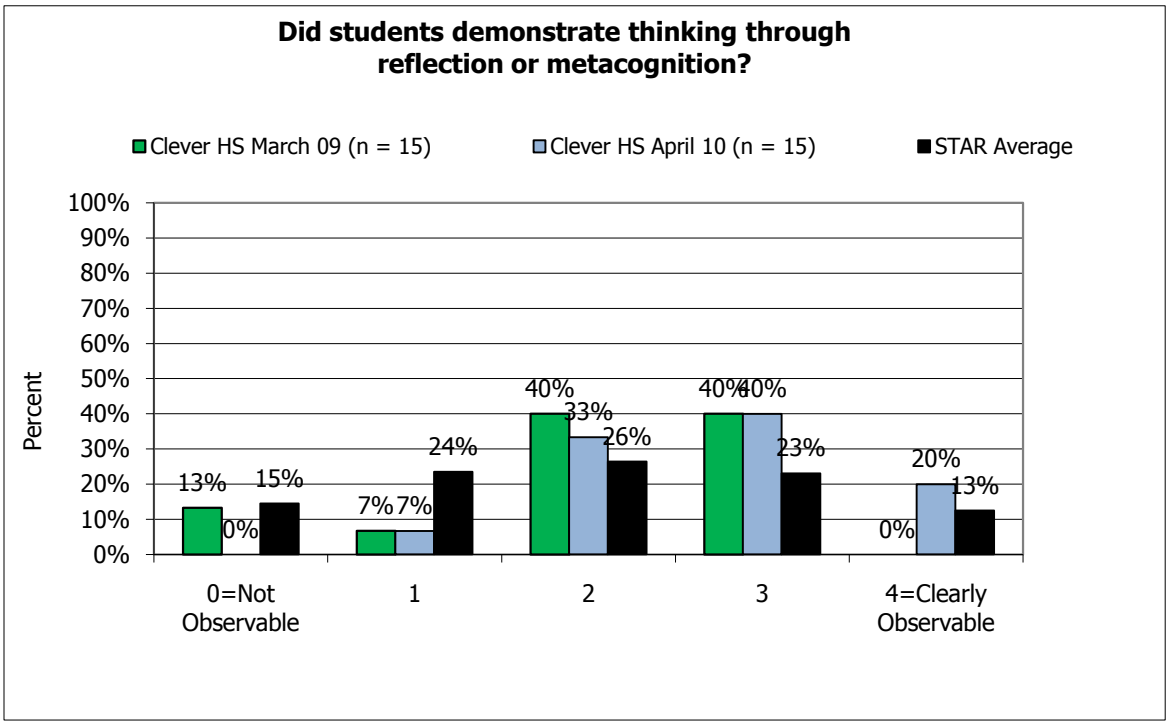
Skills



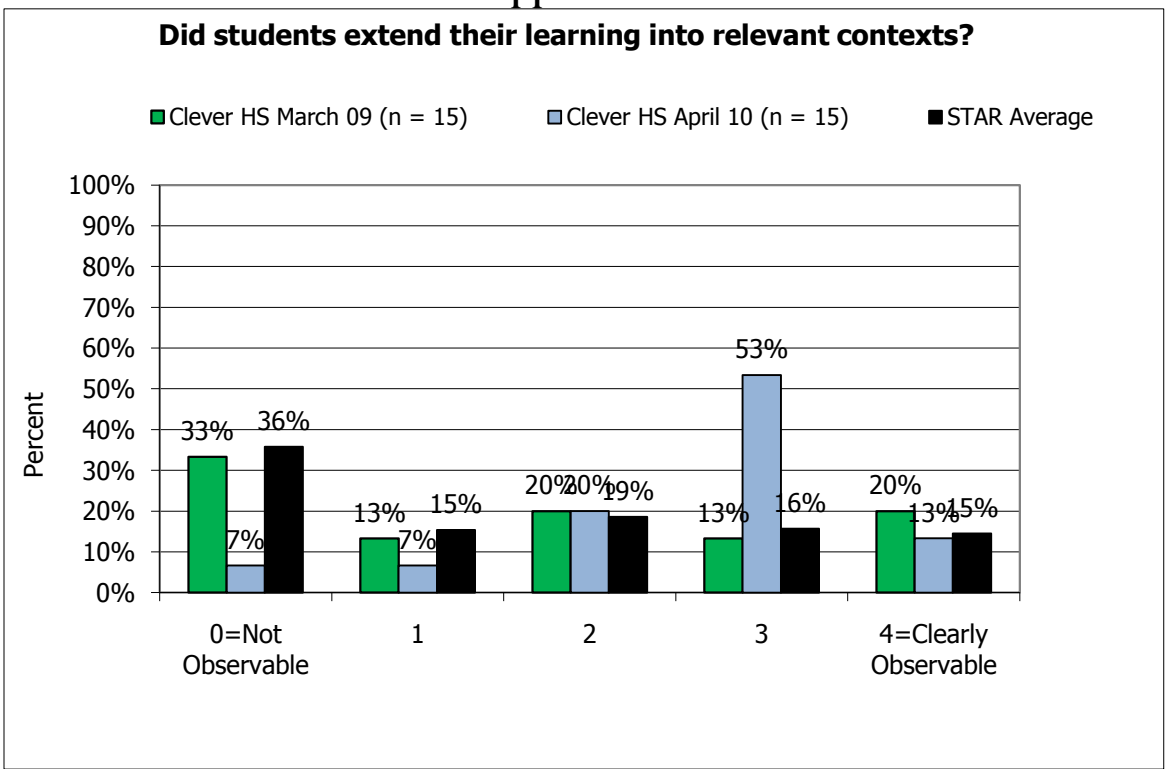
Knowledge



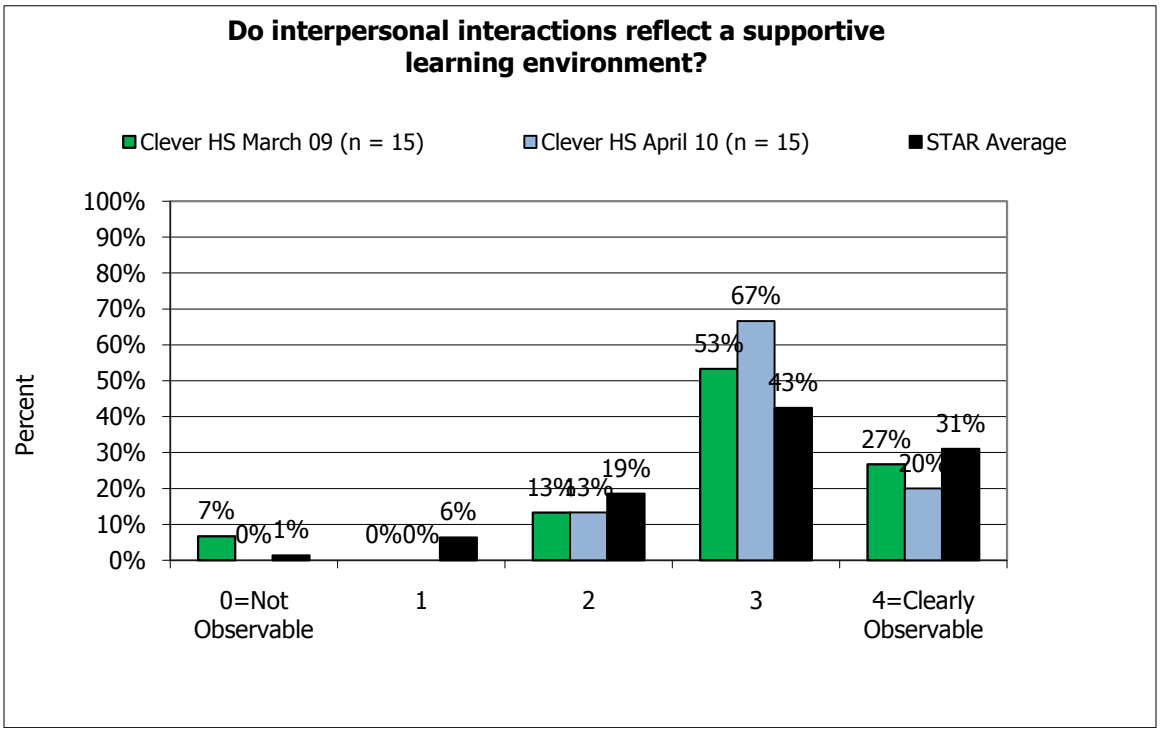
Thinking



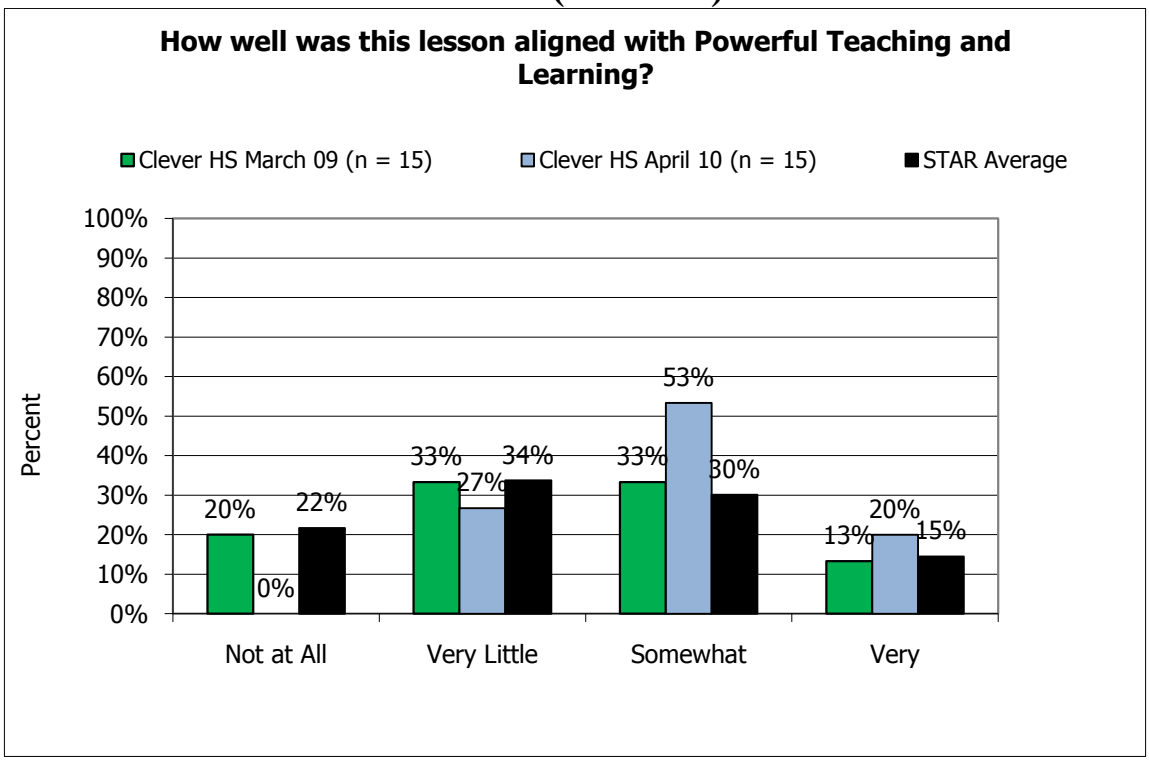
Application



Relationships



Overall (scales 1-4)



Disaggregated STAR Indicator Results

Skills Indicators	*0*	*1*	*2*	*3*	*4*
1. Teacher provides an opportunity for students to develop and/or demonstrate skills through elaborate reading, writing, speaking, modeling, diagramming, displaying, solving and/or demonstrating.	0%	0%	7%	53%	40%
				93%	
2. Students' skills are used to demonstrate conceptual understanding, not just recall.	0%	0%	20%	60%	20%
				80%	
3. Students demonstrate appropriate methods and/or use appropriate tools within the subject area to acquire and/or represent information.	0%	0%	13%	47%	40%
				87%	
Knowledge Indicators	***0***	***1***	***2***	***3***	***4***
4. Teacher assures the focus of the lesson is clear to all students.	0%	13%	47%	33%	7%
				40%	
5. Students construct knowledge and/or manipulate information and ideas to build on prior learning, to discover new meaning, and to develop conceptual understanding, not just recall.	0%	13%	20%	47%	20%
				67%	
6. Students engage in significant communication, which could include speaking/writing, that builds and/or demonstrates conceptual knowledge and understanding.	0%	0%	40%	40%	20%
				60%	
Thinking Indicators	***0***	***1***	***2***	***3***	***4***
7. Teacher uses a variety of questioning strategies to encourage students' development of critical thinking, problem solving, and/or communication skills.	20%	0%	27%	27%	27%
				53%	
8. Students develop and/or demonstrate effective thinking processes either verbally or in writing.	7%	0%	27%	47%	20%
				67%	
9. Students demonstrate verbally or in writing that they are intentionally reflecting on their own learning.	20%	13%	27%	33%	7%
				40%	
Application Indicators	***0***	***1***	***2***	***3***	***4***
10. Teacher relates lesson content to other subject areas, personal experiences and contexts.	7%	7%	20%	53%	13%
				67%	
11. Students demonstrate a meaningful personal connection by extending learning activities in the classroom and/or beyond the classroom.	20%	7%	33%	13%	27%
				40%	
12. Students produce a product and/or performance for an audience beyond the class.	73%	0%	7%	7%	13%
				20%	
Relationships Indicators	***0***	***1***	***2***	***3***	***4***
13. Teacher assures the classroom is a positive, inspirational, safe, and challenging academic environment.	0%	0%	13%	27%	60%
				87%	
14. Students work collaboratively to share knowledge, complete projects, and/or critique their work.	20%	13%	20%	33%	13%
				47%	
15. Students experience instructional approaches that are adapted to meet the needs of diverse learners (differentiated learning).	20%	7%	20%	40%	13%
				53%	

Summary and Recommendations

Overall, researchers observed instruction aligned with Powerful Teaching and Learning™ in 73% of the classes, a 26-percentage point increase from observations in March 2009 and higher than the STAR average. An analysis of the data shows that all components have shown growth from previous observations, especially the *Skills* and *Application* components, which have each increased at least 25-percentage points. This suggests there is a strong foundation for continued improvement in Powerful Teaching and Learning™. To ensure continuous improvement, we recommend that staff members explore three specific Essential Components of the STAR Classroom Observation Protocol™:

Knowledge: The *Knowledge* component scored at a moderate level, with approximately 60% of the classes observed scoring a 3 or higher on each knowledge indicator. This is a 33-percentage point increase from March 2009 results. Of the Indicators, #5 and #6 scored higher, signifying students were participating in activities that promoted the development of conceptual understanding. Over half of the lessons observed displayed students engaged in communication that demonstrated conceptual knowledge. However, researchers noted that only a few teachers had posted GLEs and learning targets for students to see (Indicator 4). Addressing learning targets and/or GLEs with students ensures that teachers focus on developing skills and concepts at an appropriate level, ensures that students understand the expectations, and, and allows students to gain a deeper conceptual knowledge of the subject. We highly recommend staff members work together to define and to display clear learning targets for students. Staff members should post learning targets every day and discuss them with students at several points in the lesson to ensure they understand the expectations. We also recommend that teachers use these learning targets to further develop Essential Questions and/or Enduring Understandings to guide lessons and small group work.

Thinking: The *Thinking* component also scored at a moderate level on the Protocol, improving 20-percentage points from the previous observation. While taking a closer look at the indicators, only half of observations recorded teachers asking high-level questions and even less (40%) displayed students demonstrating reflective learning. It is essential that teachers use effective questioning strategies to develop critical thinking in students. We recommend teachers focus their efforts on developing higher-order questions that allow students to articulate their thinking strategies, to express their opinions, and to make connections to text or to self. Staff members should also work together to develop ways in which students can reflect on their learning. Reflective activities allow students to become more effective learners and give teachers opportunities to determine if students mastered the concepts. Some ways to provide reflective opportunities include having students articulate what they learned, describe a problem-solving strategy to a peer, give and receive feedback, or state how they would change their procedure next time. Additional ways to increase reflection in the classroom is for teachers to require exit slips where students indicate the "key idea" for the day or lesson, or promoting journal entry writing where students are encouraged to make text-to-text, text-to-self, and text-to-world connections.

Relationships: The *Relationships* component was a relative strength on the Protocol, with 87% of lessons scoring 3 or 4. The *Relationships* indicators reflect positive classroom environments in which students move and work comfortably (Indicator 13). Further analysis of the indicators shows instruction could be significantly improved by having students work together more frequently (Indicator 14) and by expanding instructional approaches to meet a wider range of learning needs (Indicator 15). Researchers observed some lessons where students worked in pairs to discuss answers, researched topics for a presentation, solved math problems in small groups, and discussed problem-solving methods. However, the majority of lessons were teacher centered and did not allow for student collaboration. Small group discussions encourage students to express their opinions, to listen to the opinions of others, and to provide support for their answers, which enhances *Knowledge* and *Thinking* in the classroom. Group work can also support differentiation by having students assist each other and by providing time for teachers to address individual and group needs.

APPENDIX E – INTERVIEW/FOCUS GROUP PROTOCOLS

School and Classroom Practices Study

ADMINISTRATOR INTERVIEW/FOCUS GROUP

(Principals, Asst Principals, School Leadership Team, SCDM)

School Name:	
District Name:	
Date:	**Interviewer/Documenter:**
Total Number of Participants:	
Special Issues/Other information:	

Facilities Description

Cleanliness/order overall:
Building (halls, classrooms, etc.):
Outside/Playground:
Library:
Other (e.g., cafeteria, gym):

Tips for facilitating/documenting a focus group;

- Encourage people to talk to each other, not just to you.
- Remind participants that the object of the discussion is to provide you with different perspectives, not to come to consensus. Everyone does not have to agree and if they don't they should say so.
- If one person seems to be dominating, try to expand the discussion by asking others directly for their input on the question.
- Try to take down as much of what people say as verbatim as possible – try not to interpret or summarize.

Clear and Shared Focus

Describe the school's vision and mission.

- **How was the mission/vision developed? (What was the process?)**
- **How does the school's mission/vision influence school decisions?**
- **How is the school mission aligned with the district mission?**

Please describe your current school improvement goals and activities.

- **What specific initiatives are you and your staff focusing on? [top 3-4 if a long list]**
- **How is the mission related to your current school improvement plan?**

How is the school supporting its mission, vision and improvement goals? [Prompt for how resources (funding, time, materials, etc.) are used to support the mission and school improvement plan]

- **Describe the decision-making process used to allocate resources.**

High Standards and Expectations for All Students

How does your school set high expectations for student performance?

- **Prompt for: Common academic core? Access to advanced courses for all? EALRs and GLEs used? Teacher/admin attitudes towards students?**

How rigorous is teaching and learning at your school?

- **How knowledgeable are teachers about authentic pedagogy (active participation, collaboration, reflection, disciplined inquiry, construction of knowledge)?**
- **What areas (subjects, grades, or other) need work with regard to increasing rigor?**
- **How do you check for rigor?**

What data is used to set expectations and target instruction?

- **How is this data collected?**
- **How is the data used?**

Effective School Leadership

How are decisions made at this school? [ask about specific decision-making bodies, structures/processes in place]

- **Who is involved in the decision-making process (students, parents, community representing different subgroups)?**

In what ways are adults held accountable for meeting high performance expectations for themselves and their students?

- **How are these expectations communicated?**
- **How do you build capacity in your teachers and staff to meet these expectations?**

How does administration monitor fidelity of implementation of curriculum and instruction?

- **Are there informal tracking processes?**
- **What kinds of conversations are you having with teachers about curriculum and instruction?**
- **How often do you have conversations with teachers about student performance?**

How are teachers recruited, oriented, and incorporated into the school?

- **What criteria are used to decide if there is a "fit" between the teachers and the school?**
- **How much flexibility do you have within district hiring guidelines?**

How do you support your colleagues in taking risks and making innovations in this school? [ask for specific examples]

High Levels of Collaboration and Communication

What kinds of opportunities are there at this school for collective professional learning (e.g. CFGs, PLCs, peer observation, book studies, etc.)?

- **What is the purpose of these meetings? [How are they used? Prompt for: sharing practice, discussing student work, common lesson planning, developing common assessments, etc.]**
- **How effective are these opportunities in helping improve instruction?**
- **What percentage of the school staff participate in these opportunities?**
- **Who is included in these meetings?**

Is there a school communications plan that guides written, face-to-face, and electronic communication with the school community?

Curriculum, Instruction, Assessments Aligned with State Standards

Is there a common understanding or demonstrated agreement among your staff about what effective teaching and learning is at your school?

- **Prompt for: common language used, planning lessons in common, common rubrics, common assessments**
- **How do you encourage this?**

How is formative and summative assessment data used to make decisions about your school or modify instruction?

- **What systems are in place for screening students at risk for academic or behavioral difficulty, monitoring student progress, or pinpointing unique needs (diagnostic assessments)?**
- **How do you share this data with students, parents and other stakeholders?**

How do you document whether teaching to the standards has taken place and has been implemented with fidelity?

How do you ensure that the curriculum is aligned with key concepts, theories and content in each subject area?

Do your teachers use an instructional framework* to plan instruction? If so, please describe. [* *An Instructional framework is an overarching theory of teaching and learning that provides guidelines/key areas of focus for content and practice – e.g., STAR protocol, Habits of Mind, Inquiry-based learning, etc.]*

Frequent Monitoring of Learning and Teaching

How do you determine whether you are serving all students within a school?

- **Which groups perform the most poorly in this school?**
- **What do you do to assist those students to achieve at higher levels? [prompt: encourage them to take more rigorous classes? Academic support? Enlist parents?]**
- **How do you ensure that high achieving students continue to be challenged?**

Do you collect data disaggregated by ethnicity (e.g. achievement, discipline, etc?)

- **How do you use the data?**
- **How does it affect your policy and practices?**
- **How do you ensure that teachers use the data to target and improve instruction?**

How are teachers assigned to classes, classrooms, and schools? [prompt: where are the highly qualified teachers usually placed?]

Focused Professional Development

How does the school determine the professional development needs of its teachers?

How well are your staff's professional development needs being met?

- **Is PD doing its job to build instructional and/or leadership capacity in your staff?**

How would you assess the quality of the professional development your staff is receiving?

- **Aligned with state standards?**
- **Research-based?**
- **Incorporates principles of adult learning (participatory, relevant)?**
- **See changes in instructional practice? [give examples]**

Supportive Learning Environment

How well do you think the physical environment of your school supports teaching and learning?

- **How are students with disabilities accommodated in your school?**

How would you characterize most social interactions you see and participate in, in your school?

- **Prompt: Are they respectful? Hostile? Caring? Indifferent?**

What systems are in place to offer feedback to school leadership about what is happening in the school?

- **Who tends to use this system? [prompt: Teachers? Parents? Students? Community?]**

High Level of Family Partnership and Community Involvement

How are parents/caregivers involved in your school?

- **Prompt: classroom volunteers, PTSA, tutoring, etc.**
- **How do you build relationships with parents who are not available during school hours, have transportation problems, don't have telephone or internet access, or do not speak English?**

In what way is the community involved in your school?

- **Prompt: before/after school program sponsors, donate supplies, support clubs or sports events, partnerships, other?**

Alternative Secondary School Best Practices
[USE THESE ADDITIONAL QUESTIONS ONLY IF YOU ARE AT AN ALTERNATIVE SCHOOL]

In what ways does the district support this school?

Are there special services provided/marketed that are unique to this school compared to other schools in the district?

How are students identified for placement in alternative schools/this school?

What additional supports (if any) are provided by your school to help students stay in school and succeed academically?

School and Classroom Practices Study

COUNSELOR INTERVIEW

(Adapt for Classified Staff as well)

School Name:	
District Name:	
Date:	**Interviewer/Documenter:**
Total Number of Participants:	
Special Issues/Other information:	

Tips for facilitating/documenting a focus group;

- Encourage people to talk to each other, not just to you.
- Remind participants that the object of the discussion is to provide you with different perspectives, not to come to consensus. Everyone does not have to agree and if they don't they should say so.
- If one person seems to be dominating, try to expand the discussion by asking others directly for their input on the question.
- Try to take down as much of what people say as verbatim as possible – try not to interpret or summarize.

Supportive Learning Environment

How well do you think the physical environment of your school supports teaching and learning?

How would you characterize most social interactions you see and participate in, in your school?

- **Prompt: Are they respectful? Hostile? Caring? Indifferent?**

What systems are in place to offer feedback to school leadership about what is happening in the school?

- **Who tends to use this system? [prompt: Teachers? Parents? Students? Community?]**

How are student and staff accomplishments celebrated?

How does the school assist students in planning and preparing for the next phase of their education, training, or transition to work?

- **Is there a transition program in place?**

Frequent Monitoring of Learning and Teaching

How do you determine whether you are serving all students within a school?

- **Which groups perform the most poorly in this school?**
- **What do you do to assist those students to achieve at higher levels? [prompt: encourage them to take more rigorous classes? Academic support? Enlist parents?]**
- **How do you ensure that high achieving students continue to be challenged?**

Does the school collect data disaggregated by ethnicity (e.g. achievement, discipline, etc?)

- **How is this data used?**
- **How does it affect your policy and practices?**
- **How do you ensure that teachers use the data to target and improve instruction?**

High Level of Family Partnership and Community Involvement

How are parents/caregivers involved in your school?

- **Prompt: classroom volunteers, PTSA, tutoring, etc.**
- **How do you build relationships with parents who are not available during school hours, have transportation problems, don't have telephone or internet access, or do not speak English?**

In what way is the community involved in your school?

- **Prompt: before/after school program sponsors, donate supplies, support clubs or sports events, partnerships, other?**

Clear and Shared Focus

Describe the school's vision and mission.

- **How was the mission/vision developed? (What was the process?)**
- **How does the school's mission/vision influence school decisions?**
- **How is the school mission aligned with the district mission?**

How is the school supporting its vision, mission and school improvement plan? [prompt: How are resources (funding, time, materials, etc.) used to support the mission and school improvement plan?

- **Describe the decision-making process used to allocate resources.**

Effective School Leadership

How are decisions made at this school? [ask about specific decision-making bodies, structures/processes in place]

- **Who is involved in the decision-making process (students, parents, community representing different subgroups)?**

In what ways are adults held accountable for meeting high performance expectations for themselves and their students?

- **How are these expectations communicated?**
- **How do you build capacity in your teachers and staff to meet these expectations?**

How often do you have conversations with teachers about student performance?

How are you supported in taking risks and making innovations in this school? [ask for specific examples]

- **How do you support your colleagues in taking risks?**

How are cultural issues addressed at this school? [Prompt for: structures, policies or practices that address the effects of poverty, ethnic or racial differences, gender stereotypes, etc.]

- **What kinds of cultural training do you receive?**

High Standards and Expectations for All Students

How does your school set high expectations for student performance?

- **Prompt for: Common academic core? Access to advanced courses for all? EALRs and GLEs used? Teacher/admin attitudes towards students?**

Focused Professional Development

How well are your professional development needs being met?

How would you assess the quality of the professional development you are receiving?

- **Aligned with state standards?**
- **Research-based?**

- **Incorporates principles of adult learning (participatory, relevant)?**

High Levels of Collaboration and Communication

Are you involved in collective professional learning opportunities at this school (e.g. CFGs, PLCs, peer observation, book studies, etc.)?

- **What is the purpose of these meetings? [How are they used? Prompt for: sharing practice, discussing student work, common lesson planning, developing common assessments, etc.]**
- **How effective are these opportunities in helping you to do your work?**
- **What percentage of the school staff participate in these opportunities?**
- **Who is included in these meetings?**

Is there a school communications plan that guides written, face-to-face, and electronic communication with the school community?

Curriculum, Instruction, Assessments Aligned with State Standards

No questions in this section for counselors.

Alternative Secondary School Best Practices
[USE THESE ADDITIONAL QUESTIONS ONLY IF YOU ARE AT AN ALTERNATIVE SCHOOL]

In what ways does the district support this school?

Are there special services provided/marketed that are unique to this school compared to other schools in the district?

How are students identified for placement in alternative schools/this school?

What additional supports (if any) are provided by your school to help students stay in school and succeed academically?

School and Classroom Practices Study

TEACHER FOCUS GROUP

(Certificated Staff, Para educators, Specialists)

School Name:	
District Name:	
Date:	**Interviewer/Documenter:**
Total Number of Participants:	
Special Issues/Other information:	

Curricular/Assessment Materials

Reading/English Program:
Math Program:
School-Wide Assessments (e.g. DIBELS, Cognitive Tutor):
Other (e.g., bullying prevention programs, discipline programs, after school programs, tutoring programs):

Tips for facilitating/documenting a focus group;

- Encourage people to talk to each other, not just to you.
- Remind participants that the object of the discussion is to provide you with different perspectives, not to come to consensus. Everyone does not have to agree and if they don't they should say so.
- If one person seems to be dominating, try to expand the discussion by asking others directly for their input on the question.
- Try to take down as much of what people say as verbatim as possible – try not to interpret or summarize.

How does your school set high expectations for student performance?

- **Prompt for: Common academic core? Access to advanced courses for all? EALRs and GLEs used? Teacher/admin attitudes towards students?**

How rigorous is teaching and learning at your school?

- **How often do you see evidence of authentic pedagogy (active participation, collaboration, reflection, disciplined inquiry, construction of knowledge) in classrooms (including your own)?**
- **What areas (subjects, grades, or other) need work with regard to increasing rigor?**
- **How do you check for rigor?**

What data is used to set expectations and target instruction?

- **How is this data collected?**
- **How is the data used?**

Curriculum, Instruction, Assessments Aligned with State Standards

How do you align instruction with the content and achievement standards (EALRs, GLEs)?

- **Is there vertical and horizontal alignment?**
- **How do you document whether teaching to the standards has taken place and has been implemented with fidelity?**

Do you use an instructional framework* to plan instruction? If so, please describe.
[* ***An Instructional framework is an overarching theory of teaching and learning that provides guidelines/key areas of focus for content and practice – e.g., STAR protocol, Habits of Mind, Inquiry-based learning, etc.]***

- **Does your instructional framework incorporate principles of learning such as constructing knowledge, active engagement, meaningful content, collaboration, social interaction, and self-assessment? If yes, which ones? If not, how do you incorporate these principles into your lessons?**

Is there a common understanding or demonstrated agreement among your staff about what effective teaching and learning is at your school?

- **Prompt for: common language used, planning lessons in common, common rubrics, common assessments**

Describe the types of differentiated instruction methods you use to accommodate diverse learning needs. [prompt for ELL and SPED as well as other low performing subgroups]

- **How often do you incorporate these differentiated methods?**

What district or classroom assessments do you use?

- **How do you develop these assessments? [Prompt : use of EALRs and GLEs? Use of performance standards?]**
- **How do you use these assessments? [Prompt: formative or summative? Used to revise lesson/curriculum?]**
- **How do you share this data with students, other teachers, admin, parents, other stakeholders?**

Focused Professional Development

How does the school determine the professional development needs of its teachers?

How much professional development time do you get in a year? Is this enough time?

- **What kinds of PD activities/workshops/classes have you participated in?**
- **Who usually delivers your professional development activities/workshops/classes?**

How would you assess the quality of the professional development you are receiving?

- **Aligned with state standards?**
- **Research-based?**
- **Incorporates principles of adult learning? (Prompt: research-based, job embedded, interactive, collegial and did they include ongoing follow-up and support)**
- **See changes in instructional practice? [give examples]**

How well are your professional development needs being met?

- **Is PD doing its job to build instructional and/or leadership capacity?**

High Levels of Collaboration and Communication

What kinds of opportunities are there at this school for collective professional learning (e.g. CFGs, PLCs, peer observation, book studies, etc.)?

- **What is the purpose of these meetings? [Prompt for: sharing practice, discussing student work, common lesson planning, developing common assessments, etc.]**
- **How effective are these opportunities in helping improve instruction?**
- **What percentage of the school staff participate in these opportunities?**
- **Who is included in these meetings?**

How is student information [grades, attendance, contact information, test scores] organized, stored and retrieved? Is it easily accessible to teachers, students and parents?

Is there a school communications plan that guides written, face-to-face, and electronic communication with the school community? Is this plan widely understood and used?

Frequent Monitoring of Learning and Teaching

How do you determine whether you are serving all students within a school?

- **Which groups perform the most poorly in this school?**
- **What do you do to assist those students to achieve at higher levels? [prompt: encourage them to take more rigorous classes? Academic support? Enlist parents?]**
- **How do you ensure that high achieving students continue to be challenged? [Prompt: what structures are in place?]**

Do you collect data disaggregated by ethnicity (e.g. achievement, discipline, etc?)

- **How do you use the data?**
- **How does it affect your policy and practices?**
- **How do you ensure that teachers use the data to target and improve instruction?**

Does each low performing student have a personalized academic plan?

How are teachers assigned to classes, classrooms, and schools? [Prompt: where are the highly qualified teachers usually placed?]

Clear and Shared Focus

Describe the school's vision and mission.

- **How was the mission/vision developed? (What was the process?)**
- **How does the school's mission/vision influence school decisions?**
- **How is the school mission aligned with the district mission?**

Please describe your current school improvement goals and activities.

- **What specific initiatives are you and your staff focusing on? [top 3-4 if a long list]**
- **How is the mission related to your current school improvement plan?**

Effective School Leadership

How are decisions made at this school? [ask about specific decision-making bodies, structures/processes in place]

- **Who is involved in the decision-making process (students, parents, community representing different subgroups, other stakeholders)?**

In what ways are adults held accountable for meeting high performance expectations for themselves and their students?

- **How are expectations communicated?**
- **How are you supported in meeting these expectations?**

How does administration monitor fidelity of implementation of curriculum and instruction?

- **Are there informal tracking processes?**
- **What kinds of conversations do you have with admin about curriculum and instruction?**
- **How often do you have conversations with administrators about student performance?**

How are you supported in taking risks and making innovations in this school? [ask for specific examples]

How are cultural issues addressed at this school? [Prompt for: structures, policies or practices that address the effects of poverty, ethnic or racial differences, gender stereotypes, etc.]

- **What kinds of cultural training do you receive?**

Supportive Learning Environment

What kinds of school-wide classroom management and discipline policies are in place?

- **How well are these working?**
- **How consistently are these monitored and enforced?**
- **How do all students and families know what is expected of them?**

What strategies do you use to develop relationships with your students?

- **How does developing and maintaining relationships with your students affect your teaching and their learning?**

What systems are in place to offer feedback to school leadership about what is happening in the school?

- **Who tends to use this system? [prompt: Teachers? Parents? Students? Community?]**

How are student and staff accomplishments celebrated?

How does the school assist students in planning and preparing for the next phase of their education, training, or transition to work?

- **Is there a transition program in place?**

High Level of Family Partnership and Community Involvement

How are parents/caregivers involved in your school?

- **Prompt: classroom volunteers, PTSA, tutoring, etc.**
- **How do you build relationships with parents who are not available during school hours, have transportation problems, don't have telephone or internet access, or do not speak English?**

In what way is the community involved in your school?

- **Prompt: before/after school program sponsors, donate supplies, support clubs or sports events, partnerships, other?**

Alternative Secondary School Best Practices

[USE THESE ADDITIONAL QUESTIONS ONLY IF YOU ARE AT AN ALTERNATIVE SCHOOL]

In what ways does the district support this school?

Are there special services provided/marketed that are unique to this school compared to other schools in the district?

How are students identified for placement in alternative schools/this school?

What additional supports (if any) are provided by your school to help students stay in school and succeed academically?

BAKER ■ EVALUATION ■ RESEARCH ■ CONSULTING

School and Classroom Practices Study

STUDENT FOCUS GROUP

School Name:	
District Name:	
Date:	**Interviewer/Documenter:**
Total Number of Focus Group Participants:	
Special Issues/Other Information:	

Tips for facilitating/documenting a focus group;

- Encourage people to talk to each other, not just to you.
- Remind participants that the object of the discussion is to provide you with different perspectives, not to come to consensus. Everyone does not have to agree and if they don't they should say so.
- If one person seems to be dominating, try to expand the discussion by asking others directly for their input on the question.
- Try to take down as much of what people say as verbatim as possible – try not to interpret or summarize.

Clear and Shared Focus

Tell me what your school stands for. What is your school trying to do for students?

If another student was going to move into this area and come to your school, what would you tell them about your school?

High Standards and Expectations for All Students

What kinds of things do you do in class?
How do you know what your teachers' goals are for your work?

- **How do you know what you have to do to get a good grade?**
- **How do you know the steps you have to take to learn more?**

How do your teachers challenge you to do your best work? [ask for specific examples]

What study skills do your teachers teach you at this school?

How much homework do you get? How often? [NOTE: This may elicit more data at MS and HS level]

Effective School Leadership

Does anyone ask for your ideas about what should happen at the school? If yes, who and when? If not, why do you think they don't?

How does your school treat students from different cultures? [prompt for structures, policies or practices that address the effects of poverty, ethnic or racial differences, gender stereotypes, etc.]

- **What kinds of cultural programs are there at this school?**

High Levels of Collaboration and Communication

Do you see your teachers working together on lessons or on teaching a class? [give example]

- **How did this compare to when your teacher works alone?**

How does the school tell you and your family about what is going on at school? [Prompt: How do you hear about events like PTSA meetings or assemblies or things like that?]

- **Do you feel like your parents/caregivers know what is going on at school? If not, why not?**

How do your teachers give you information about your grades, attendance, contact information, test scores? How do you get this information [prompt: teacher tells me, online, hard copies, other]?

Curriculum, Instruction, Assessments Aligned with State Standards

Describe a good teacher. Do all of you agree?

How do your teachers make sure everyone understands what they're teaching?

- **Can you give me some examples of ways that they help all students understand? [prompt for ELL or SPED students and for gifted students]**

What happens after you take a test in class? How do you figure out what you got wrong and what you got right?

- **How do you learn what you didn't know on the test?**

Frequent Monitoring of Learning and Teaching

How do your teachers encourage all students to take harder classes and do their best work?

- **What kind of support does the school give you to help you take harder classes? [prompt for: study skills, after school support, in class support, etc.]**

How do your teachers help students who are struggling?

Supportive Learning Environment

Tell me about the classroom and school rules for when students get in trouble. What happens?

- **How well are these working?**
- **Do you think they are fairly enforced?**
- **Do all students and families know the rules? How are they told?**

How well do you know your teachers?

- **What do your teachers do to get to know you better?**
- **Does it make a difference in class if you know your teachers better and they know you?**

How do people treat each other in your school? [prompt: Are they respectful? Mean? Caring? Don't care?]

How are student accomplishments celebrated?

How does the school help you in planning and preparing for the next step in your education, training, or transition to work? [prompt: preparing for MS or HS or post HS options]

- **Is there a transition program in place to help you?**

High Level of Family Partnership and Community Involvement

How is your family involved in this school? [prompt: classroom volunteers, PTSA, tutoring, etc.]

How do your teachers and principal get to know your parents? [prompt for cases where parents are not available during school hours or have transportation problems or don't have telephone or internet access, or don't speak English.]

In what way is the community involved in your school? [prompt: before/after school program sponsors, donate supplies, support clubs or sports events, partnerships, other?]

Alternative Secondary School Best Practices

[USE THESE ADDITIONAL QUESTIONS ONLY IF YOU ARE AT AN ALTERNATIVE SCHOOL]

What is special about this school?

How are students picked to come to this school?

How does your school help students stay in school and succeed academically?

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School and Classroom Practices Study

CAREGIVER/COMMUNITY FOCUS GROUP

School Name:	
District Name:	
Date:	**Interviewer/Documenter:**
Total Number of Participants:	
Special Issues/Other information:	

Tips for facilitating/documenting a focus group;

- Encourage people to talk to each other, not just to you.
- Remind participants that the object of the discussion is to provide you with different perspectives, not to come to consensus. Everyone does not have to agree and if they don't they should say so.
- If one person seems to be dominating, try to expand the discussion by asking others directly for their input on the question.
- Try to take down as much of what people say as verbatim as possible – try not to interpret or summarize.

Clear and Shared Focus

Describe the school's vision and mission.

- **How was the mission/vision developed? (What was the process?)**
- **Were you part of the process?**
- **Does the mission/vision meet with your goals for your child's education?**

High Standards and Expectations for All Students

How would you describe the level of learning going on at this school? [ask for specific examples]

- **How satisfied are you with this level of learning?**

What kind of expectations do teachers and the school have of your child?

- **Are the expectations realistic?**
- **Do the expectations challenge your child to learn more?**

Effective School Leadership

How are decisions made at this school? [ask about specific decision-making bodies, structures/processes in place

- **How are parents consulted in decision-making at the school (if at all)?**
- **Who makes most of the decisions?**
- **How are you told about decisions made at the school?**

How are cultural issues addressed at this school? [prompt for structures, policies or practices that address the effects of poverty, ethnic or racial differences, gender stereotypes, etc.]

- **What kinds of cultural programs do you see at this school (if any)?**

High Levels of Collaboration and Communication

What methods does the school use to communicate with you?

- **Which methods are most commonly used?**
- **Which methods are most effective?**

Does the school have translation services for those parents and students who need them?

How accessible is student information [grades, attendance, contact information, test scores] to you?

Curriculum, Instruction, Assessments Aligned with State Standards

How well do you think the curriculum used in this school challenges your child?

How effective are teachers in this school at helping your child learn and improve?

Have you seen or heard of teachers using different instructional methods to teach students with diverse learning needs? [prompt for ELL and SPED as well as high performing subgroups]

- **How often do you see these methods incorporated into the classroom and lesson?**

How do you find out the results of your student's classroom assessments?

- **How do these assessments help you understand your child's academic strengths and challenges?**

Frequent Monitoring of Learning and Teaching

How does the school encourage all students to pursue more rigorous classes?

- **What structures and services are in place to do this? [prompt for: study skills, after school support, in class support, etc.]**

What does the school do to assist students who are doing poorly?

Supportive Learning Environment

What kinds of school-wide behavioral and attendance expectations are in place?

- **How consistently are these monitored and enforced?**
- **Do all students and families know what is expected of them? How are they told?**

How well do you know your child's teachers?

- **How well do you think the teachers know your child?**
- **Do you think these relationships make a difference in your child's education? How?**

Do you feel welcome at this school?

If you have a problem with something, what systems are in place to offer feedback to school leadership about what is happening in the school?

How are student accomplishments celebrated?

How does the school assist students in planning and preparing for the next phase of their education, training, or transition to work?

- **Is there a transition program in place?**

High Level of Family Partnership and Community Involvement

How are parents/caregivers invited to become involved in this school? [prompt: classroom volunteers, PTSA, tutoring, etc.]

How does the school build relationships with parents?

- **What about those who are not available during school hours**
- **Those who have transportation problems or who don't have telephone or internet access?**
- **Those who do not speak English?**

In what way is the community involved in this school? [prompt: before/after school program sponsors, donate supplies, support clubs or sports events, other?]

Alternative Secondary School Best Practices

[USE THESE ADDITIONAL QUESTIONS ONLY IF YOU ARE AT AN ALTERNATIVE SCHOOL]

In what ways does the district support this school?

Are there special services provided/marketed that are unique to this school compared to other schools in the district?

How are students identified for placement in alternative schools/this school?

What additional supports (if any) are provided by your school to help students stay in school and succeed academically?

APPENDIX F – RUBRIC SCORING SHEET

School: _____ Date: _____

Reviewer: _____ Lead? Y N

Indicators	Rubric Score
Clear and Shared Focus	
Core Purpose – Student Learning	

Comments:

High Standards and Expectations for All Students	
Academic Focus	
Rigorous Teaching and Learning	

Comments:

Effective School Leadership	
Attributes of Effective School Leaders	
Capacity Building	
Distributed Leadership	

Comments:

High Levels of Collaboration and Communication	
Collaboration	
Communication	

Comments:

Curriculum, Assessments, and Instruction Aligned with State Standards	
Curriculum	
Instruction	
Assessment	

Comments:

Frequent Monitoring of Teaching and Learning	
Supporting Students in Need	

Comments:

Focused Professional Development	
Planning and Implementation	
Curriculum, Instruction, and Assessment	

Comments:

Supportive Learning Environment	
Safe and Orderly Environment	
Building Relationships	
Personalized Learning for All Students	

Comments:

High Levels of Family and Community Involvement	
Family Communication	
Family and Community Partnerships	

Comments:

APPENDIX G – SAMPLE SCHOOL AND PRACTICES STUDY REPORT

Grand Middle School

School and Classroom Practices Study

Introduction

The purpose of this report is to provide baseline information about school improvement efforts at Grand Middle School (GMS). This report is intended to be formative in nature to assist in the ongoing implementation of improvement goals and action plans at the school and district levels. Evaluators obtained information during a site visit on October 13, 2009. Approximately 35 people, including administrators, certificated and non-certificated staff members, students, and parents participated in interviews and focus groups. In addition, evaluators conducted 26 classroom observations to determine the extent to which Powerful Teaching and Learning™ was present in the school. Finally, evaluators accessed information gathered through the Washington Improvement and Implementation Network. The additional information includes school and district improvement plans, student achievement data, district climate survey data obtained from the Timber Public Schools website, and additional school documents.

The following section includes an overview of the findings. This is followed by a detailed review of the schools alignment to the *Nine Characteristics of High Performing Schools*. The report concludes with a summary and recommendations.

Overview

Using data collected through the School and Classroom Practices Study, team members reached consensus on scoring decisions for 19 Indicators organized around the *Nine Characteristics of High Performing Schools*. Each Indicator was scored using a rubric along a continuum of four levels that describe the degree to which a school is effectively implementing the Indicator. The four levels are:

4 – Leads to continuous improvement and institutionalization (meets criteria in column 3 on this indicator plus additional elements)
3 – Leads to effective implementation
2 – Initial, beginning, developing
1 – Minimal, absent, or ineffective

Indicators with a score of a 3 or above represent strengths in the school, whereas Indicators with a score of 2 or below warrant attention. Recommendations in this report do not address each Indicator, but instead focus on a few priority areas. School and district staff members should review this report and accompanying recommendations with the realization they are based on a snapshot in time, and some school improvement efforts may already be underway but were just not evident.

The school improvement plan should be developed or revised to select, to implement, and to monitor the recommendations deemed most appropriate and critical to improving student achievement. Reviewing the district improvement plan will help staff members select goals and

strategies that align with the district priorities. A Technical Assistance Contractor will provide assistance with this process.

Table 1 includes rubric scores for all the Indicators.

Table 1

Indicator Scores for the Nine Characteristics of High Performing Schools

Indicators	Rubric Score
Clear and Shared Focus	
Core Purpose – Student Learning	2
High Standards and Expectations for All Students	
Academic Focus	2
Rigorous Teaching and Learning	2
Effective School Leadership	
Attributes of Effective School Leaders	2
Capacity Building	2
Distributed Leadership	2
High Levels of Collaboration and Communication	
Collaboration	3
Communication	2
Curriculum, Assessments, and Instruction Aligned with State Standards	
Curriculum	2
Instruction	2
Assessment	3
Frequent Monitoring of Teaching and Learning	
Supporting Students in Need	2
Focused Professional Development	
Planning and Implementation	2
Curriculum, Instruction, and Assessment	2
Supportive Learning Environment	
Safe and Orderly Environment	2
Building Relationships	2
Personalized Learning for All Students	2
High Levels of Family and Community Involvement	
Family Communication	2
Family and Community Partnerships	2

School and Classroom Practices Study Findings

Clear and Shared Focus

Everyone knows where they are going and why. The focus is on achieving a shared vision, and all understand their role in achieving the vision. The focus and vision are developed from common beliefs and values, creating a consistent direction for all involved.

Indicators	Rubric Score
Clear and Shared Focus	
Core Purpose – Student Learning	2

Core Purpose – Student Learning. At GMS, there is a general understanding of the school's mission and of the focus of school improvement, but there is less commonality regarding the direction of the work. Staff members varied in awareness of the school's mission statement. Some provided the mission statement as it currently appears on the website: "The Grand learning community expects high achievement, citizenship, and success for all." However, most provided other statements, such as "To actively prepare students for high school," "To increase performance scores on district tests and WASL," and "To give students the knowledge to make good decisions as adults." While these statements reference learning, they do not necessarily underscore higher achievement for all students and closing the achievement gap.

According to GMS staff members, their goals and improvement are driven by the district priorities, which include standards-based instruction, learning targets, and student engagement. Some believe the district priorities reflect goals GMS had already identified. "One of the best things of all of this is that they were things we are already doing," said one person. In 2008-2009, GMS staff members focused on "snapshots," content area meetings, and formative assessments. For 2009-2010, they are focused on standards-based instruction with continued implementation of "snapshots," formative assessments, and Professional Learning Communities. To support the work, the district has provided opportunities for staff members to participate in curriculum adoptions, in setting goals, and in relevant workshops. These opportunities helped build buy-in. By most reports, however, people differ in their commitment to the priorities. One person said, "We don't know who is on board. We don't get into many people's classrooms."

Staff members differ in their ideas for reaching GMS and district goals. Many regarded the School Improvement Plan as a document prepared for the district, rather than a working document to guide their decision-making and resource allocation. As a result, there is uncertainty about their direction, and this makes it difficult for the staff to work as a unit. One person said, "With curriculum mapping, I know where I am going, but with school improvement, I don't know where we are going. I see the components, like summative and formative assessments and standards-based grading, but what's next? I don't see it." Another commented, "There needs to be better cooperation among teachers about the initiatives and how they impact kids."

High Standards and Expectations for All Students

Teachers and staff believe that all students can learn and meet high standards. While recognizing that some students must overcome significant barriers, these obstacles are not seen as insurmountable. All students are offered an ambitious and rigorous course of study.

Indicators	Rubric Score
High Standards and Expectations for All Students	
Academic Focus	2
Rigorous Teaching and Learning	2

Academic focus. Staff members reported widespread understanding of state standards and of district academic expectations. They vary in their perception of the level of expectations for GMS students. Those who believe expectations are high point to teacher and student engagement as evidence. One person said, "You see teacher engagement and student engagement, and those two interact so there is a classroom conducive to learning." Another commented, "Students are on task. They are enjoying themselves yet getting something from the task. They look forward to the assignments and know they will be tested." However, others thought expectations could be higher. One said, "There needs to be more people on board with high expectations." Staff members said several contextual factors make it difficult to maintain high expectations, such as student mobility and high absent rates. Parents were uncertain if expectations were high at GMS. GMS staff members have received professional development on rigor, and school leaders hope this will lead to greater consistency across the building.

Most students said the classroom environment is more challenging than the work they are assigned. "In certain classes, it's harder to concentrate [because] people are not getting along," said one student. Regarding academic demands, another said, "Most of it's easy. There's not a lot of homework, just a lot of class work." Students also said they had little influence over the level of class placement. One student said, "We don't get to choose our classes. The teachers just put you in them." Another said, "I think they put you in [classes] because of behaviors. You can end up in classes with all the people with behavior issues." Some students questioned whether enough was being demanded of them. For example, one student said, "I don't think we're taught the right stuff. I have an A-plus in my class and then failed the WASL."

Rigorous teaching and learning. Classroom observation results reflect several strengths in instruction at GMS. In 77% of the lessons observed, students were actively reading, writing and/or communicating (*Skills*) and 81% had key qualities of supportive learning environments (*Relationships*). However, there was less evidence of students demonstrating higher-order thinking (*Thinking*) or extending their learning into relevant contexts (Application). Several people believe an incremental shift in curricula and pedagogy is occurring. For example, some teachers have introduced rubrics to their students as part of the move toward standards-based instruction and assessment. One staff person commented, "Kids feel more responsible and involved. There's less negative feedback since they had the rubric beforehand. Now it's less like I'm a judge." Students believe teachers are responsive to their learning needs. On district climate surveys, the majority of staff members and students believe GMS expects all students to achieve high academic standards. About half the parent respondents agreed. Three-quarters of the staff believes the curriculum is rigorous, while approximately half the student and parent respondents concurred.

Effective School Leadership

Effective instructional and administrative leadership is required to implement change processes. Effective leaders are proactive and seek help that is needed. They also nurture an instructional program and school culture conducive to learning and professional growth. Effective leaders have different styles and roles. Teachers and other staff, including those in the district office, often have a leadership role.

Indicators	Rubric Score
Effective School Leadership	
Attributes of Effective School Leaders	2
Capacity Building	2
Distributed Leadership	2

Attributes of effective school leaders. Staff members at GMS said their school is in transition due to recent changes in the administration and in the district's approach to programs and instruction. Although there was general agreement that GMS is making improvements, most said cohesion is lacking. Further, several people believe progress should be monitored according the School Improvement Plan. One person captured this saying, "I don't see [the plan] being the driving force. We don't come back to it enough, like you do with a lesson. There is some sort of assessment that is missing…we are missing the 'is it working?' and 'how is it working?'" While the areas of focus identified by the district and the school guide staff efforts, only some teachers understand how this directly relates to improving instruction and student outcomes in their classrooms. Typically, these teachers have received more direct support and are able to connect the larger goals directly to classroom activities.

Capacity building. GMS staff members described an ongoing evaluation process that initially includes a pre-conference, an observation, and a post-conference. After four years, they develop a personal professional growth plan. Teachers differ in their perceptions of administrator presence in the classroom, but generally agree that most visits are associated with the formal evaluation process or with specific district targets. For example, administrators may visit classrooms to look for learning targets and to ask students what they are learning. While some teachers are bothered by the low presence of administrators in the classrooms, others wonder if it simply reflects confidence in teachers. Teachers spoke of receiving assistance from coaches and facilitators to improve their practices. Adult learning also occurs in some teacher groupings, such as Professional Learning Communities, but this varies across the building. Teachers believe they are expected to perform well but did not identify high expectations for adults as part of the school culture.

Distributed leadership. There are several forms of leadership at GMS. The Leadership Team is a formal decision making body, and teachers have input to the Leadership Team through representatives. This year, the Leadership Team is more cohesive and is more consistent in disseminating information regarding their decisions. There is also the School-Centered Decision-Making team (SCDM). In addition, there are department and grade level teams, which are led by teachers. Depending on the specific leadership role, staff members obtain leadership positions through election or appointment and may receive a stipend for their time. There is some dissatisfaction with the current processes for indentifying school leaders and populating the decision-making bodies. However, several noted there are now more real leadership opportunities than in the past, which is an improvement.

At the time of this study, the GMS staff appeared to be adjusting their approach to decision-making. Although the decision-making process was not fully defined, efforts were underway to develop a matrix that identifies the parties responsible for specific types of decisions.

Students said they have little involvement in school decision-making, but the Associated Student Body plans events, such as dances, a walkathon, or free dress days. When parents were asked if they or other parents were involved in school decision-making, they were not aware of a structured process. One commented, "I hope so. They do encourage parent involvement, and there is a PTA."

High Levels of Collaboration and Communication

There is strong teamwork across all grades and with other staff. Everybody is involved and connected to each other, including parents and members of the community to identify problems and work on solutions.

Indicators	Rubric Score
High Levels of Collaboration and Communication	
Collaboration	3
Communication	2

Collaboration. GMS staff members meet in Professional Learning Communities (PLCs) according to content area. They also work in grade level teams to promote scaffolding, to address changes in curricula, and to do curriculum mapping around common goals. Staff members are seeking connections among content areas. For example, social studies and language arts teachers are having students use the same approach to reference citations. The cohesion and progress of PLCs vary, with those having a clear focus and consistent goals being more developed.

Individual teachers expressed interest in sharing practices and student work. Most efforts in these areas has occurred among math teachers who did learning walks last year, provided feedback on each others' "Do Now", and shared their work during planning periods. Teachers believe there is openness to having staff members visit classrooms, but there are barriers including lack of time and locked doors due to safety. One said, "If I have time I go to observe… People are always welcoming."

Communication. Most GMS staff members believe internal communication is adequate. There is no structured communications plan, and each body is responsible for generating its own communication. Consequently, the frequency and format of communication varies.

Teachers and counselors access student information online in order to more directly address their needs. Parents also have access to this information and can track student assignments through their planners. When students fall behind, teachers contact parents, and parents are very appreciative of this. Translation services are ordered on an as-needed basis and segments of the newsletter are translated into key languages. Staff members described the need for translation as low. However, they also noted that some classrooms have as many as five English Language Learner students.

Curriculum, Instruction, and Assessments Aligned with State Standards

The planned and actual curriculums are aligned with the Essential Academic Learning Requirements and Grade level Expectations. Research-based teaching strategies and materials are used. Staff understands the role of classroom and state assessments, what the assessments measure, and how student work is evaluated.

Indicators	Rubric Score
Curriculum, Assessments, and Instruction Aligned with State Standards	
Curriculum	2
Instruction	2
Assessment	3

Curriculum. In conjunction with district efforts, GMS staff members are continuing to align curricula with district and state standards. Some of the vertical and horizontal alignment is achieved through district adoptions and pacing guides. These define what students should know and be able to do, and provide a framework for organizing lessons. There is a district focus on providing standards-based learning targets for each lesson. According to teachers, there has been more work to align math and science than language arts, social studies, or electives. Teachers have time to discuss alignment on waiver days but believe this is inadequate and are interested in late start days to further this work.

Instruction. According to classroom observations, almost two-thirds of the lessons observed consisted of instruction aligned with the principles of learning. This appears to be the result of individual teacher efforts rather than a common instructional framework. Although the district focus on standards-based instruction has provided some common language and goals, teachers do not agree on the elements that need to be consistent across classrooms. One commented, "We all are supposed to have the 'snapshot' with activities and learning targets. Everybody talks about it, but I think they are all different." Some believe consistent instruction is the school's biggest challenge, after the contextual factors associated with the population.

Teachers said they adjust their instruction to meet the needs of students. One offered several examples saying, "You try your best… I use probes to get feedback to see if they are ready to move on. I use white boards for quick checks, exit slips…I slow down, move fast, turn to visual aids." To further meet learning needs, teachers also meet with students after school and call parents to support learning at home.

Assessment. Staff members understand the district emphasis on standards-based instruction includes formative assessments. They have received training in this area and are attempting to implement formal and informal assessment strategies, including exit slips and rubrics. For example, the math team has implemented rubrics, which enables them to align grading with standards-based instruction. One person observed, "I was afraid it would be more work but realize it's not. This is better." Teachers find this form of assessment has changed their instruction. One commented, "My instruction is a lot more focused on what the standards say. It's more direct and purposeful." The shift toward standards-based assessments has required some education of parents. A teacher commented, "Parents are not on board yet, so I make connections for them, correlating numbers and letters." However, teachers also noted the current grading system, including the online grade reporting, is not compatible with this approach.

Frequent Monitoring of Learning and Teaching

A steady cycle of different assessments identify students who need help. More support and instructional time are provided, either during the school day or outside normal school hours, to students who need more help. Teaching is adjusted based on frequent monitoring of student progress and needs. Assessment results are used to focus and improve instructional programs.

Indicators	Rubric Score
Frequent Monitoring of Teaching and Learning	
Supporting Students in Need	2

Supporting students in need. Interviewees described the GMS staff as caring and invested in students. "There are people who do sincerely care about students and are interested in the success of kids," said one person. Many teachers provide personal assistance to students after school. Students in need of extra support in reading or math may take an intervention class in addition to their regular class. Other programs to support students include summer school, homework club, and formal and informal afterschool opportunities such as team tutoring or tutoring by the Honor Society. In addition, counselors use individual counseling and groups to assist some students. Those with behavior needs have specific interventions and daily progress monitoring.
Students said they sometimes do not feel comfortable asking questions in class because teachers get frustrated. One student commented, "Teachers say you should already know it, but some students are behind and don't want to ask for help." Others fear ridicule from their peers if they ask questions. However, they also believe teachers expect them to ask for clarification or help if they do not understand something. Some students feel they must choose between exposing themselves to the frustration of the teacher, the ridicule of their peers, or not understanding the work.

Parents were aware of some of the supports available to students, such as afterschool programs, tutoring, and academic clubs. They varied considerably in their perception of teachers' direct support for individual students. While they believe most teachers are accommodating, flexible, and willing to provide extra help, they also believe some teachers are less helpful. One simply said, "Some teachers work for students and some don't."

Focused Professional Development

A strong emphasis is placed on training staff in areas of most need. Feedback from learning and teaching focused extensive and ongoing professional development. The support is also aligned with the school or district vision and objectives.

Indicators	Rubric Score
Focused Professional Development	
Planning and Implementation	2
Curriculum, Instruction, and Assessment	2

Planning and implementation. Staff members said they are expected to participate in professional development as part of their employment. Researchers could not identify a formal process to assess the professional growth needs of the GMS staff. However, professional development opportunities are available to teachers through the district, through the school, and on an individual basis. The district provides training in priority areas, in alignment with the goals and agenda they have set forth. "Professional development within the district provides plenty of opportunities for training and clock hours to advance our certification," commented one person. Staff members believe the training would have more impact if there were follow-up. However one commented, "We had a wavier day that teachers thought was great, but there was no time as a building to follow up."

Curriculum, instruction, and assessment. In support of high expectations, professional development at GMS has included a focus on rigor. The staff looked at the definitions and purpose of rigor and compared and contrasted different levels of rigor. Teachers believe this will changes the level of rigor and expectation in their classes through the restructuring of assignments. They have also focused on formative assessment strategies and on standards-based instruction. GMS staff members hope to use some additional training time to provide opportunities for teachers to collaboratively examine student work.

Supportive Learning Environment

The school has a safe, civil, healthy, and intellectually stimulating learning environment. Students feel respected and connected with the staff and are engaged in learning. Instruction is personalized and small learning environments increase student contact with teachers.

Indicators	Rubric Score
Supportive Learning Environment	
Safe and Orderly Environment	2
Building Relationships	2
Personalized Learning for All Students	2

Safe and orderly environment. Students and staff members find the physical structure of GMS an asset, saying the building supports the needs of the school. Perceptions of expectations and management of behavior differed, however. There is no school-wide behavior program, and "teachers can use their own system within the larger system." However, staff members attempt to implement consistent measures at the beginning of the year. These include giving warnings, assigning time-out, sending a student to a buddy teacher, and finally a referral to the office. Some teachers believe a stronger response to behavior from the administration is needed, whereas others believe a school-wide program would improve consistency and present a clearer message to students. Still others believe teachers and counselors should work individually with students to modify behavior.

Students identified several positive features of the school climate that contribute to a sense of well-being. For example, one said, "The principal and teachers make you feel welcome and help you learn." Another added, "The counselor sings at lunch and says happy birthday to all students." Most feel comfortable speaking with counselors about school matters and feel they can "talk to anybody about problems." However, a number said there were difficulties among students. They described tension among groups of students based on socio-economic status, students making fun of each other beyond adult awareness, and a lack of respect among peers. They also believe a subset of students does not take behavior consequences seriously and continue to be disruptive. One said, "It's kind of scary with people cussing and saying bad things about people." However, they also noted that significant behaviors are addressed by the administration.

Parents had concerns about the school environment. One person said, "They need improvement on harassment and bullying. There's a lot of things going on." Another commented, "There are no behavior expectations or consequences. Students are being bullied." Parents were frustrated, saying the school is aware of the problem but has not taken enough action to protect students. They also believe there needs to be consistent enforcement of rules. The results of district climate surveys show that about half of the parent respondents believe the school is effective in dealing with difficult student behaviors, including bullying. Interestingly, less than half of the staff agreed. In contrast, three-quarters of students believe the school handles these problems effectively.

Building relationships. Staff members in various roles acknowledged difficulties with relationships in the building. There is cohesion within some groupings and tension in others. While some described GMS as "a good building" with a "good work environment," others said relationships between staff members and the administration are "strained" and "polar opposites."

Difficulties in the school led some to request involvement of the union last year, and this further divided the staff. Some staff members are reluctant to express their opinions for fear of retribution. One said, "There's not a whole lot of safety in the building climate. People don't feel like they can say much. There's not a lot of trust." Factions exist among staff members around a variety of issues, including the efforts to involve the union and perceptions of allegiance to the administration (both current and past). Some attributed these difficulties to teacher turnover or to adjustments that occur with any change in administration. One said, "It's not that the staff doesn't get along, as much as they don't know each other.
There are few opportunities to get together and know each other." Teachers are not sure the climate will quickly change. Capturing the sentiments of a number of staff members, one person said, "I don't know that you can change someone's heart. No matter what the administration does, I'm not sure people will change."

Personalized learning for all students. Individual staff members reported making efforts to personally connect with students and to support their learning as much as possible. One said, "We let students know we care, greet them, and know them well enough to ask if things are going wrong." Transition activities for incoming 5th graders include school visits, presentations from counselors, and an exchange between the middle school and elementary school orchestras. Eighth graders visit the high school, and high school counselors and students visit GMS to prepare them for the transition. GMS also uses the Navigation 101 curriculum, which includes college visits and personal long-term planning.

High Level of Family and Community Involvement

There is a sense that all have a responsibility to educate students, not just the teachers and staff in schools. Families, as well as businesses, social service agencies, and community colleges/universities all play a vital role in this effort.

Indicators	Rubric Score
High Levels of Family and Community Involvement	
Family Communication	2
Family and Community Partnerships	2

Family communication. GMS uses several forms of communication to connect with families. They send notes home through students, call parents, and parents have access to progress reports and grades online. GMS has implemented student-led conferences. Students described these saying, "We have a binder of stuff, and tell [our parents] what we working on, what we are doing good and need work on. It's helpful if your parents know what's going on and can help you with it."

Parents said they feel welcome in the building, even when they are expressing concerns. They believe the school reaches out to families through general communication, individual communication, and events such as open houses and meetings of the Parent Teacher Association. They are pleased to have access to grades online, but noted that some parents are unlikely to have ready access to computers. Those who were interviewed said many teachers quickly respond to messages. One added however, "I don't know if it's favoritism, but some teachers will call you for anything and other teachers will let it slide until a parent shows up." Parents receive notification when a student is falling behind.

On district climate surveys, three-quarters or more of the staff and student respondents believe the school embraces and is effective in working with families of different cultures and ethnic groups. Approximately two-thirds of the parents agreed.

Family and community partnerships. Researchers did not identify a specific policy for family or community partnerships. A small percentage of parents have been involved in assisting with dances, field trips, and cafeteria management. Community partnerships support some of the additional services and activities provided to students, such as afterschool programs.

Summary and Recommendations

This School and Classroom Practices Study for Grand Middle School showed evidence of attention to each of the *Nine Characteristics of High Performing Schools*. While most Indicators are currently in the "Initial, beginning, developing" stage, there is stronger development in two important areas. There is evidence of *Collaboration*. Staff members are meeting together to develop individual and school-wide practices. They are meeting in Professional Learning Communities, and some are beginning to use their collaboration to integrate learning across content area and to develop classroom practices. Staff members have also focused on *Assessment*, and there are clear efforts in the area of standards-based assessment. Some teachers have enabled students to understand the true nature of assessment by providing rubrics to them. Further, teachers are reflecting on these practices and outcomes and are using those reflections to further guide their work. These efforts on *Collaboration* and *Assessment* are pivotal, as they reflect direct attention to the working relationships and collective resources of the staff, as well as to student outcomes.

As Grand Middle School and Timber Public Schools continue to work on improvement, there are several areas of growth worth considering. It will be important for the entire staff to understand and agree on the mission of the school, and this mission needs to focus on achievement for all students. Further, this mission should drive all work. In other words, it should be possible for any staff member to connect whatever they are doing directly to that mission. In addition, it will be helpful for staff members to clarify the specific goals they are working toward, how and when they will measure their progress, and a means for periodically reviewing and revising goals. Building relationships are also of concern, and it is worth taking the time to address the underlying tension. Staff members may wish to consult with other schools that have successfully managed tension or change in order to learn about their processes and resources. Clarifying the selection processes for leaders and decision-making responsibilities will also improve relationships and progress toward goals. Finally, building the capacity of staff members will support the work that needs to be done. If staff members agree on where they are headed, are able to work together, have a clear understanding of leadership roles and responsibilities, and have confidence and skills to do their work, it will be easier to achieve their goals.

APPENDIX H – SAMPLE POWERPOINT PRESENTATION FOR REFLECTIVE MEETINGS

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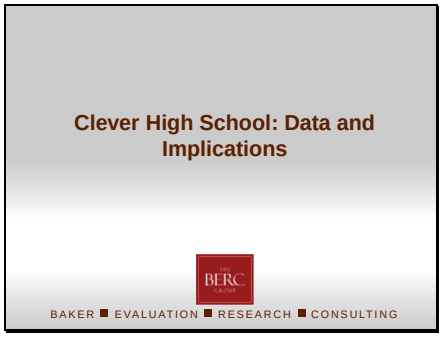

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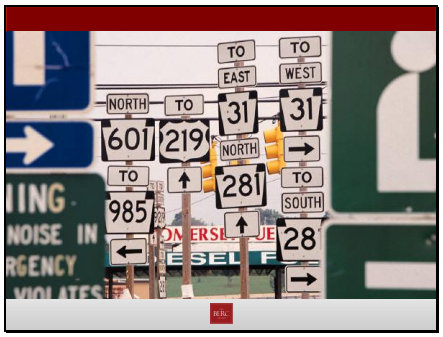

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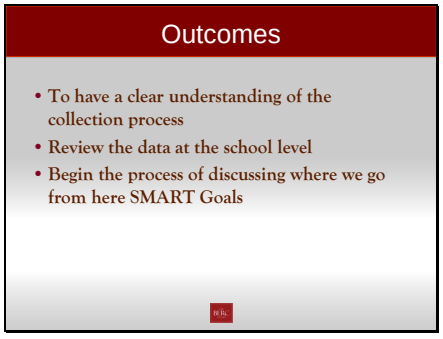


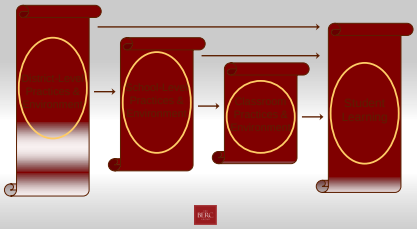
Slide 4

Agenda

- Brief overview: Alignment of Systems
- Brief overview of the data collection process
  - When we collected it
  - What we collected
  - How we processed
- Review school and classroom practices data
  - School practices data
  - STAR Classroom Observation data
  - High School Outcome Data
- Develop SMART Goals
  - Identify areas of focus
  - Begin drafting goals

Slide 5

Theory of Change



Slide 6

Reflection

What do you know about the school level data collected? What questions do you have?

Slide 7

School and Classroom Practices Study

- **Conducted Spring 2009**
- **Focus on School and Classroom Practices**
- **Information gathered through:**
  - Interviews and focus groups (n = 40)
    - Administrators
    - Certificated and non-certificated staff members
    - Students
    - Parents
  - **Classroom Observation Study**
  - **Other data/information gathered**
    - School and district improvement plans
    - Educational Effectiveness Survey (EES)
    - High School Outcomes (Surveys, Course Offering, Transcripts, College Attendance)
    - Other school/district documents
  - **Triangulated all findings around multiple data points.**

Slide 8

School and Classroom Practices Study

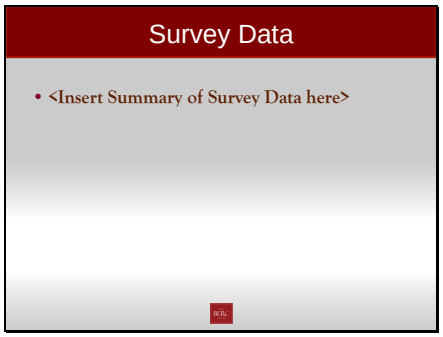
- Team members (2) reached consensus on a rubric on a rubric of 19 indicators organized around the *Nine Characteristics of High Performing Schools.*
  - *Clear and Shared Focus*
  - *High Expectations for All Students*
  - *Effective School Leadership*
  - *High Levels of Collaboration and Communication*
  - *Curriculum, Assessments, and Instruction Aligned with State Standards*
  - *Frequent Monitoring of Teaching and Learning*
  - *Focused Professional Development*
  - *Supportive Learning Environment*
  - *High Levels of Family and Community Involvement*
- **Alternative Secondary School Best Practices**
  - District Support
  - School Learning Environment
  - Rigor and Expectations

Slide 9

School and Classroom Practices Study

- **Rubrics**
  - Scores of 3 or above represent relative strengths
  - Scores of 2 or below warrant attention
    - Snapshot in time

Slide 10



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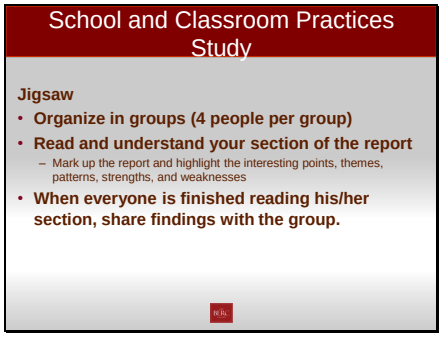

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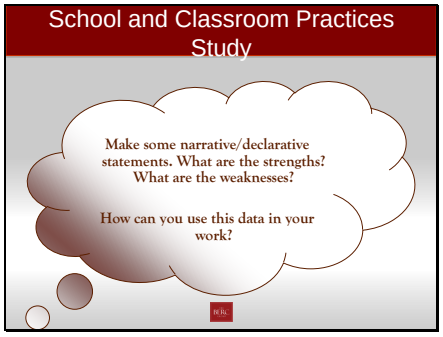

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School and Classroom Practices Study

- **Classroom Observation Study**
  - Used the STAR Protocol
    - Organized around 5 Essential Components (Skills, Knowledge, Thinking, Application, and Relationships)
    - AND 15 Indicators
    - AND 95 Strategies
  - Observed call classrooms except PE, music, and high impact special education 25 to 30 minutes
  - One observer/per classroom, with two observers in every 10th observation to calibrate

Slide 14

STAR Classroom Observation Data

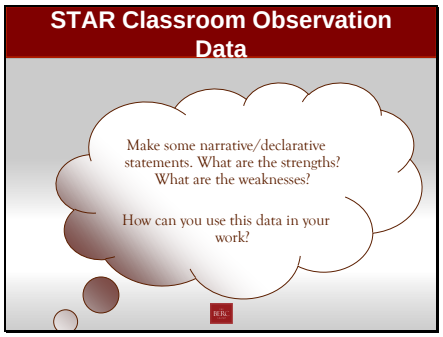
- <Insert Summary of Classroom Observation Data Here>

Slide 15

STAR Classroom Observation Data

- Power of the Data is in the Indicators
  - Quietly review the data, identifying patterns, areas of strength, and areas of weakness using the STAR Classroom Observation Reflection Page

Slide 16



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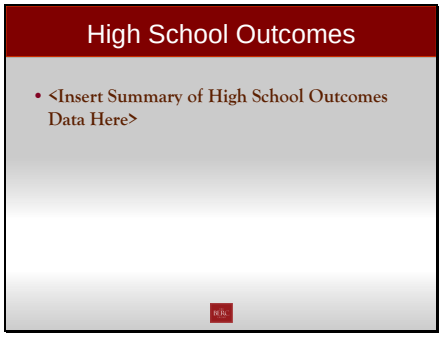

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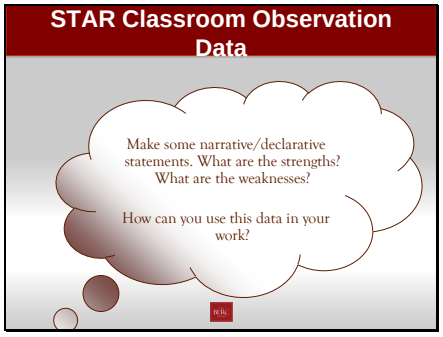

Slide 19

SMART Goals

- Brain storm possible goals, based on your present reality.
  - These forms will be collected for future work with your TAC.
  - Future goal setting should take into consideration the district plan.

APPENDIX I – SPR RUBRIC INTERNAL REVIEW

APPENDIX J – SMART GOAL WORKSHEET

[print this form using landscape orientation for greater ease of use]

SMART Goal Worksheet

School: _____

Team Name: _____

Team Leader: _____

Team Members:

School Goal(s)

	Strategies and Action Steps	Responsibility	Timeline	Evidence of Effectiveness
Present Reality				
Our Goal				

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