

# 5 SCHOOL IMPROVEMENT LOOPS THAT WE GOTTA GET RIGHT TO IMPACT STUDENT PERFORMANCE



# ACCELERATION OVER REMEDIATION

Student expectations are built by design. Master schedules, teaching assignments, and tutoring supports are just some examples of the decisions school leaders must consider when creating the right learning environment for their students. Though remediation is necessary, grade-level proficiency is the goal. While schools should always celebrate student progress, progress is not an outcome. The most successful schools build actionable, verifiable systems of acceleration designed to get all students to mastery. This begins with a belief in high expectations and leads to a culture of high achievement. These schools put their vision for excellence into the practice and routines of ambitious instruction. This includes a relentless focus on key instructional systems such as rigorous learning tasks, explicit success criteria, authentic practice and feedback, and spiraled instruction.




# TEACHER GROWTH AND LEADERSHIP

Schools that retain great teachers will win the day. The research on teacher effectiveness is clear and decisive. There is nothing that matters more to student achievement than great instruction. Successful school leaders build great teams, beginning with hiring the right people. In these schools, the hiring process is tightly managed to ensure that only the best candidates are selected. Leaders are fully invested in these decisions, and do not assign them to others to complete. Celebrating both new and veteran teachers is paramount. Teamwork and culture are evident across all meetings, trainings, and events. In the most successful schools, distributed leadership is shaped and promoted. Teachers lead major initiatives, including professional development. Teacher voice in decision making is encouraged and valued. Sustainable student achievement is only possible in schools where staff retention is strong and teacher agency is cultivated.



# STRATEGIC RESTRAINT




Successful leaders learn quickly that less is more. The most successful schools are strategic and purposeful in narrowing their focus to a few key actions that impact student performance. These schools build structures based on a core belief that doing a few things well is more effective than doing many things poorly. Schools can be overwhelmed by a constant flow of data, information, and ideas coming at them from social media posts, educational conferences, research studies, and a long line of instructional experts. Successful leaders are skillful in absorbing and filtering information to keep themselves and their school teams focused. Some strategic actions are adopted and cultivated while others are rejected or delayed because they might distract from organizational culture or outcomes. In these schools, student achievement is positively impacted not by a specific strategy or process that a school selects but from a singular belief and resolve in doing these things well on behalf of students.



# DATA AGENCY AND AGILITY

Data can inform and empower learning, or it cannot. The most successful schools collect the right types and amounts of data with the singular mission of getting all students to meet grade-level standards. These schools also provide ready-access to the data to teachers, students, and families. A key element in successful schools is not only access but agency.



The use of data to inform teacher decision-making and improve student self-reliance is key. Data outcomes are less likely to improve achievement if students are not responding to the data with an actionable method for improving their own performance. Schools must remain agile as the school year progresses so they are ready to respond at any moment. This might mean changing student interventions or even shifting teaching assignments. The decisions must be logical and reliable, not simply reactionary. Success in schools is not derived from reviewing the data but from a well-executed plan for reshaping it. In this manner, schools know what students need to reach mastery without fail and without guesswork.



# SHARED ACCOUNTABILITY

Successful schools have high professional standards. The curriculum, instruction, and interventions are skillfully designed and effectively monitored.

Leaders in these schools are well-versed in effective classroom processes and pedagogy. Instructional time is creatively planned and closely protected.

Leaders know that student achievement for all is not possible if quality instruction is only available to some. Successful schools create a culture of shared

purpose and trust, beginning with a commitment among staff to learn and grow their craft. Staff

members hold each other accountable in a collegial and supportive manner. Classroom observations and feedback are constructive and affirming. In these

schools, no student goes unnoticed. Absences are addressed as nothing is more detrimental than lost instructional time. Staff absences are anticipated by

hiring substitute teachers who are “on deck” and ready to go or by planning for administrators and

other staff to step in on short notice. In the most successful schools, personal and professional

relationships are clearly evident and celebrating a student or colleague never gets old.



■ *Best Practices in Education*

## **5 SCHOOL IMPROVEMENT LOOPS THAT WE GOTTA GET RIGHT**

Provided to schools and districts  
as an educational resource.  
The information can be used  
and amended as needed for  
educational purposes.

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