Illinois Center for School Improvement Framework: Core Functions, Indicators, and Key Questions

The Core Functions and Indicators, which form the structure for the delivery and execution of Illinois Center for School Improvement (Illinois CSI) services, describe the big ideas or effective practices for any district. These big ideas are bolded in the indicator statements.

All indicators are important in the creation and sustainability of efficient and effective high-performing districts, inclusive of the seven federal school turnaround principles. Taken as a whole, if the indicators are implemented fully across the system, it is likely that student performance, adult practices, and the culture and climate of the system will substantially improve.

Key questions, when answered, yield data to determine the degree of implementation of each indicator. With one exception, all key questions are important to answer for all districts. The exception is Core Function A, Indicator 2, Key Question b, which is unique to designated districts receiving priority services.

CORE FUNCTION A. MANAGEMENT AND OPERATIONS consist of the basic functions that districts need to carry out to operate the district (e.g., administrative, personnel, fiscal management).

Core Functions and Indicators

The district manages and provides leadership through:

1. Clearly **defined roles and responsibilities for, and mutually supportive relationships between,** the school board, superintendent, and administrators (e.g., the school board develops policy, the superintendent establishes procedures and manages the implementation of policy, and school administrators have operational flexibility for implementing procedures).

   a. How does the superintendent work in partnership with board members to review and adopt policies that support accomplishment of district goals and that depict a shared responsibility for student achievement?

   b. How has each central office function been (re)designed to improve performance, including the identification of high-quality relevant services for schools, and to work across, rather than within, traditional central office functions?

2. Regular review of administrator performance to ensure **strong and effective leadership** in improving student performance and adult practices.

   a. How are the Illinois Performance Standards for School Leaders used to review administrator performance?

   b. How has a principal in a priority and/or focus school demonstrated the transformational leadership competencies of driving for results, influencing and developing others, analytical and conceptual thinking, and demonstrating self-confidence to lead and guide the change effort?

   c. How are administrator evaluation data used to ensure strong and effective leadership across the district? If the results of administrator evaluation do not support transformational leadership, has the administrator been replaced?

3. Management of human resources that ensure **recruitment, employment, retention, and assignment of highly qualified teachers and administrators** who are able to improve instruction.

   a. What research- or evidence-based processes are used to recruit and hire the highest quality staff possible?

   b. How does the district ensure that staffing assignments are aligned with the unique competencies of staff members? Are staff members assigned to positions and schools where these skills are most needed (e.g., distribution of teachers who have equal experience, effectiveness, and education levels)?

c. How does the district ensure that all retained staff are effective and have the ability to be successful? How does the district make sure ineffective staff are not assigned or transferred to schools in greatest need?

4. Clear and frequent **communication and engagement mechanisms** with all stakeholders, including families and community members, about progress toward district goals and compliance with board policies using data as the basis for assessment.

   a. What opportunities exist for meaningful input from and feedback to staff, parents, families, community members and organizations, and business partners?

   b. How does the district leadership team work in partnership with local school board members, families, and community members to continually review and communicate progress toward meeting district- and school-worthy targets and actions for instruction and achievement?

   c. How do the district and school communicate with the community about the use of data at the student, program, school, and district levels?

   d. What strategies are used to assist school leaders to network with and develop sustainable partnerships consistent with district goals and worthy targets?

5. **Enforcement of board policies and district procedures** that are reviewed regularly for effectiveness and communicated as appropriate.

   a. What procedures and review cycles are in place for board policies to ensure all policies are enforced, are up-to-date, are aligned with improvement efforts, are followed regularly, and achieve the desired effect?

   b. What methods are used to determine if district practices, based on board policy and district procedures, are applied consistently, are matched to improvement efforts, and achieve the desired effects?

   c. What communication strategies are used to ensure that all stakeholders have access to current board policies and district procedures?

6. **Equitable distribution of resources,** including people, time, money, materials, and technology across the system based on student and school needs.

   a. What board policies, procedures, and practices ensure equitable opportunities and outcomes for students through purposeful distribution of resources (i.e., time, money, personnel, technology)?

   b. What discretion do schools have in the allocation of resources, selection of personnel, training, and consultation that fit the requirements of their improvement plan and evolving needs?

   c. How does the district ensure that all students have access to, and that no student groups are unequally represented in, academic and nonacademic opportunities (e.g., advanced coursework)?

7. **Design of the school day, week, or year** to maximize **time for student learning and time for adult collaboration** to concentrate on the priority work of the district and optimize student learning.

a. How do board policies and district procedures ensure "opportunity to learn" time (e.g., length of the school day, MTTS and enrichment, limits on unscheduled interruptions)?

b. How does the district use proven strategies to create a school day, week, or year that optimizes student learning?

c. How does the district use proven programming strategies to create a school day, week, or year that optimizes time for adult learning and collaboration?

8. Efficient and streamlined processes for **management of district finances** that follow good business management practices and efficiently allocate available resources to educational programs, specifically integrating resources to ensure district goals are supported adequately.

a. How does the district demonstrate that it aligns expenditures with districtworthy targets that focus explicitly on supporting teaching and learning?

b. What quality assurance processes exist to ensure that processes for managing district finances are efficient and streamlined?

c. How are external entities monitored to ensure that the work they have been selected to do is consistent, aligned, and coherent with the plans, policies, and procedures of the district?

9. A **safe and effective learning environment** that addresses nonacademic factors that affect student achievement, such as the social, emotional, and health needs of all students and staff.

a. What board policies and district procedures exist to promote the integration of the social-emotional learning standards for all students?

b. What board policies and district procedures, practices, and programs exist to ensure a safe and caring learning environment for all students and staff?

c. What board policies and district procedures, practices, and programs promote and support the health and wellness of all students and staff?

d. How does the district promote, enhance, and sustain a participatory and responsive culture at the district, school, and classroom levels, creating a positive climate conducive to learning?

10. **Compliance** with federal and state regulations and requirements.

a. How does the district demonstrate adherence to relevant state and federal requirements?

b. Has the district responded to all annual financial and compliance audit findings?

c. How does the district address physical plant needs to ensure that schools are clean, attractive, and safe?

CORE FUNCTION B. LEARNING OR INSTRUCTIONAL INFRASTRUCTURE
identifies the responsibilities of a district to provide the tools and resources necessary for all schools in the system to support and deliver high-quality teaching and learning.

Core Functions and Indicators

The district and schools establish, support, provide, or have access to:

1. A **standards-aligned curriculum** that includes PK–12 curriculum frameworks or guides that define a set of knowledge, skills, and behaviors of appropriate content and rigor to prepare all students for college and careers.

    a. What collaborative processes and structures are used to develop, continuously examine, and improve content area curriculum to ensure its alignment with Illinois Learning Standards?

    b. What processes has the district implemented to ensure the use of an aligned, standards-based curriculum that promotes higher-order thinking skills and integrated performance districtwide?

    c. How does the district and its individual schools ensure that programs and materials are aligned to the curriculum, appropriately challenging, and differentiated to match student needs?

2. **Instruction and classroom management practices** that are evidence based, differentiated, and accessible in all classrooms.

    a. What instructional and classroom management frameworks define the practices expected to be implemented in all classrooms?

    b. How do the district and school leadership teams ensure that all instructional leadership teams use research-based instructional practices and supports to meet the needs of all students?

    c. How does the district ensure that high-quality curriculum and instruction are accessible to all students?

3. A **comprehensive system of learning supports** that provides differentiated support for all students based on academic, physical, behavioral, social, and emotional needs.

    a. How do the district and school leadership teams ensure that all teachers and support staff understand, recognize, and address physical, social, and emotional barriers to student learning?

    b. What multitiered approach to support all students, including those with special needs, is available across the system?

    c. How does the district ensure the consistent and equitable implementation of the multitiered approach by instructional leadership teams to gauge student improvement and to reduce unsubstantiated referrals?

    d. How does the district support students as they transition in and out of schools as well as between schools, grades, and classrooms?

4. **Data management practices that are in place to govern** collecting, storing, accessing, analyzing, and disseminating district-, school-, and student-level data to enable making informed decisions to improve student performance and adult practices.

   a. What statistical programs, electronic data tools, and processes do district and school leadership teams use to collect and store data to identify, analyze, interpret, and prioritize needs?

   b. What processes and structures are in place to ensure that data are provided in a user-friendly format that enables analysis and interpretation of reliable, valid, and timely data?

   c. How has the district combined data from different sources for the purpose of providing users with a coherent and cohesive view of data in order to make informed decisions to improve student performance, adult practices, and district functions?

5. Consistent administration and use of districtwide and school-level **formative and summative assessments** aligned with the curriculum.

   a. Does the district provide support and access to assessment literacy expertise?

   b. Does the district have a balanced assessment system aligned with the curriculum that includes the purposes, expectations, and limitations of formative assessment for learning and summative assessment of learning at all grade levels?

   c. How do the district and school leadership teams ensure the use of consistent scoring protocols for formative or interim assessments in all classrooms?

6. A **teacher and principal evaluation** system to improve educator effectiveness that incorporates professional practice and student growth in evaluation.

   a. What instructional framework informs the district's evaluation system? How does the district incorporate multiple measures of performance with clear expectations for instructional improvement?

   b. What process does the district use to align the instructional framework and Illinois Learning Standards to ensure that what is being evaluated in teacher practice is the same as what's being expected instructionally?

   c. What is the type and frequency of feedback provided to teachers and principals?

   d. How does the district assist administrators to maintain a balance of instructional leadership and school management responsibilities, and increase district responsibility for supporting principal growth aligned with the Illinois Performance Standards for School Leaders?

   e. How does the district address the communication, design, and student growth and implementation questions outlined in the Illinois State Board of Education Guidance Document on District Decision Making created by the Performance Evaluation Advisory Council?

7. Differentiated **induction and mentoring** supports for all district and school staff.

a. What process does the district use to align the district's induction and mentoring program to the Illinois Induction Program Standards Continuum?

b. What are the process and content of the orientation program for staff new to the district and school, including performance and cultural competency?

c. How does the district select, prepare, and provide the time and resources for internal and external mentors to coach and observe beginning teachers?

d. What are roles and responsibilities of mentors who observe and coach beginning teachers? How do mentors reflect on and modify practices to improve skills and results?

e. What supports and processes does the district use to support all staff not meeting district-identified expectations?

8. **High-quality**, **job-embedded, ongoing professional development** for district and school staff aligned with teacher and student needs and teacher evaluation and support systems.

a. How do the district and school leadership teams determine the professional development needs of individual staff members or groups of staff, including data from educator evaluations consistent with planworthy targets and actions?

b. How do the district and school leadership teams ensure the provision of high-quality professional development to address the prioritized, identified needs in the applicable content area(s)?

c. What processes and adult practice measures do the district and school leadership teams use to verify the application of knowledge and skills learned through high-quality professional development in daily practice?

d. How do the district and school leadership teams provide resources, such as time and expertise, for job-embedded professional development, consistent with planworthy targets and actions?

9. District, school, and instructional leadership teams use **data to inform instruction** by collecting and analyzing data to identify student needs, consistently implementing changes to instruction, and monitoring the effectiveness of modifications.

a. How does the district provide leadership teams (district, school, and instructional) access to assessment and other data in a format conducive to analysis?

b. What protocols are used during meetings that include analysis of student performance and adult practice data, discussion of progress in implementing designated practices, identification of effective practices that will be consistently implemented, decisions regarding student intervention, and next steps?

10. Clear and frequent **communication and engagement mechanisms** with families to assist them in supporting and participating in the **learning process** of their students.

a. How do the district and school leadership teams use multiple means to ensure two-way communication with families and the community that is in the primary language, is clear, and fosters participation?

b. What are the strategies for building the capacity of families to support learning at home?

c. How are socioeconomic status, cultures, and languages cultivated to maximize family engagement?

11. A schedule design that allows individual schools to **maximize learning time** for students and **minimize the impact of disruptions** that prevent the school from fulfilling its educational mission.

a. How do districts and schools implement procedures that maximize student engaged learning time or time on task?

b. How much instructional time is provided, and how is it organized?

c. What classroom management strategies are consistently used in all classrooms to promote time on task (i.e., room arrangement, rules and procedures, transitions, preparation, and pacing)?

CORE FUNCTION C. DISTRICT AND SCHOOL CONTINUOUS IMPROVEMENT is
the process to improve the quality of the systems, supports, structures, services, and culture,
which support student learning.

Core Functions and Indicators

The district and all schools have:

1. A **single focused, integrated continuous improvement plan with clear adult practice and student performance measures** that is part of a continuous and recursive cycle: assess needs, set direction, create actions, monitor, evaluate.

    a. What data-informed process has the leadership team developed to select worthy targets aligned with district goals and school needs?

    b. What data-informed actions have the district and school leadership teams taken to develop measureable, practical, and realistic measures for each worthy target (i.e., student performance and adult practice measures designed to close achievement and expectation gaps for every subgroup)?

    c. What data-informed process has the district and school leadership teams devised to develop an appropriate and manageable number of actions for each worthy target that identify the people responsible for actions and timelines for implementation?

    d. What processes does the district have in place to ensure that the improvement process is continuous and reflective?

2. **Aligned resources** to support deep implementation of planworthy targets and actions that are managed effectively and efficiently.

    a. How do the district and school leadership teams facilitate the intentional use of district resources, including time, staff, money, materials, and technology, to support worthy targets for instruction and achievement?

    b. How are resources leveraged from a variety of sources to maximize full implementation of the worthy targets and actions?

    c. How are decisions about resource allocation made by the district and school leadership teams to achieve increased student performance results and changes in adult practices?

3. Processes and structures to ensure the **analysis and interpretation of reliable, valid, and timely quantitative and qualitative data for (a) plan development, (b) problem solving to inform instruction**, (c) monitoring progress, and (d) professional skill building.

    a. What types of data (student learning, perception, process and program, demographics) do the district and school leadership teams collect, organize, and summarize for each of the four purposes (a–d) identified?

b. How do the district and school know that the quantitative and qualitative data are the right data at the right time and that they assess what is intended to be assessed?

c. What are the interdependent processes and structures for using data at the classroom, school, and district levels?

4. **Leadership teams** that work **collaboratively** in a culture of candor and climate of trust, that participate in frequent, regularly scheduled, purposeful meetings, and that follow routines which support collaborative work, high expectations, professionalism, and evidence-based deliberation.

a. How are collaborative teams—which include the superintendent on the district leadership team, principal on the school leadership team, central office person or liaison on the school leadership team(s), and building representatives on the district leadership team—focused on the work detailed in the plan at the district, school, and classroom levels?

b. What norms, behaviors, procedures, protocols, and expectations do the district, school, and instructional leadership teams use for routine operation that ensure members have defined roles, that encourage questions, and that challenge the group to open up to new ideas?

5. High-quality, differentiated **professional development** informed by data that is **job embedded and intentionally supports implementation of worthy targets** and is **aligned across the system** to achieve desired changes in adult practices.

a. What process does the district use to examine all professional development to ensure that such development consistently supports implementation of the worthy targets?

b. How is professional development evaluated to determine impact on changes in teacher practice and student performance?

c. How do the district and school leadership teams provide multiple opportunities for learning, practice, and differentiated support for all staff to ensure implementation fidelity of worthy targets?

6. Ongoing **communication and feedback** loops for all **internal stakeholders** regarding planning, implementation, and progress monitoring.

a. What communication structures, processes, and protocols are used consistently to communicate within and across teams (district and school, horizontally and vertically) at all levels?

b. What communication structures, processes, and protocols are used consistently to communicate with all internal stakeholders (e.g., support staff, custodians) about district and school improvement efforts?

7. An **intentional monitoring system** to ensure implementation of the plan with fidelity and strategies to intervene early when there is insufficient progress in improving student performance or changing adult practices.

a. How are adults at all levels held accountable for results (i.e., not meeting specified student performance and adult practice measures)?

b. How do the district and school leadership teams implement actions and monitor worthy targets in every school and classroom?

c. How do the district and school leadership teams evaluate the extent to which the plan implementation produced the desired results as defined by the goal targets?

8. Protocols and progress monitoring data to make corrections during the course of the year and evaluate ineffective practices and **scale successful practices** across the district.

a. How do the district and school leadership teams use data to identify programs or practices that are not aligned with worthy targets or are ineffective in meeting worthy targets and that should be eliminated or revised?

b. How do the district and school leadership teams use data to generalize successes in programs or practices across the system?

c. What proactive evaluation processes do the district and school(s) follow to adapt to changing conditions and unforeseen circumstances, while maintaining focus on teaching and learning as their core work?

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