

THE GREAT SCHOOLS FRAMEWORK: An Introduction

Our great schools framework presents our beliefs about the essential elements of great schools. It represents our thinking, our research base, and our commitment as we partner with schools to achieve both long-term and short-term excellence. In all of our work, our belief is that our focus on **collaborative leadership, effective teaching and learning, and positive school culture** supports the unique character of each school.

Collaboration between the principal and teachers develops shared educational leadership and fosters a climate for continuous improvement in student performance and school renewal (Sergiovanni, 2000; DuFour & Eaker, 200x; Lambert, xxxx). Consensus about the school's goals and responsibilities and the means for achieving success are shared school-wide. Teachers know and understand the leadership roles they can assume in the school. Together, the school-wide community implements an organized structure for achieving long-term goals of excellence. Professional development is connected to classroom practice. Grade level teams work both horizontally and vertically to promote the development of a professional learning community focusing on success for all. Engaging in professional dialogue that focuses on student outcomes enables teachers to answer the questions: What do we want the student to learn? How will we know they have learned it? How and why will they learn it? What will we do if they have not learned it?

At the heart of **effective teaching and learning** in a great school are research-based strategies for developing literacy across the content areas. An integrated balanced literacy framework provides a focus for school-based professional development. Through school-wide professional development, individual coaching, and facilitation IER emphasizes the development of professional knowledge, both theoretical and practical, that results in improvement in teaching practices and builds capacity for shared ownership for the success of all students. Student success is enhanced with classroom practices that are developmentally appropriate. Constructivist teaching methods promote meaningful and engaging instruction that involves students in the learning process, promotes assessment for learning, and encourages active learning and mutual inquiry. Effective, culturally responsive teaching strategies provide a

basis for instruction that address standards while connecting content to children's own experiences.

A **positive school culture** is a vital component of great schools (Eaker, DuFour & DuFour, 2002). Schools achieve a positive school culture characterized by high expectations and mutual respect for all – students, teachers, families, and community – by nurturing relationships that promote a caring environment (Noddings, ____). Attending to the needs of the whole child and having appreciation for the uniqueness of each individual results in feelings of belonging. In great schools, families are valued as partners in their child's learning. Clear expectations for appropriate behavior are consistent throughout the school. Consequences for unacceptable behavior are understood and reinforced by students, faculty and parents. Together the school community engages in rituals and celebrations of learning. Teachers create an environment that fosters enthusiasm for learning.