INSTRUCTIONAL EXCELLENCE

The Instructional Framework Rubric Guide

Accompaniment to the Instructional Framework

Sample

Contents

Using This Resource 5
The Instructional Framework Conceptual Foundations 6
IF Rubric Indicators 8
Indicator 1. Reflect 8
Reflect Look-fors 9
1A. Continuous Learning. Teachers apply new learnings to demonstrate growth toward professional and school-wide goals. 9
1B. Data-Driven Reflection. Teachers measure and document their own and students' progress toward professional or school-wide goals. 10
1C. Data-Driven Planning. Teachers make and adjust instructional decisions based on reflections. 10
1D. Maximizing 1:1 Time. Teachers use independent reflection and prework to maximize coaching conversations. 11
1E. Collaborative Coaching. Teachers actively participate in reflection during coaching conversations. 11
Indicator 2. Plan 11
Plan Look-fors 12
2A. Standards. Teachers understand the progression of grade-level standards and learning targets. 12
2B. Scope and Sequence. Teachers identify and select relevant standards and learning targets from different ELA content areas (e.g., literature, informational texts, foundational skills) to guide weekly instructional plans. 13
2C. Impact. Teachers create or select "I Can" statements connected to the main standards for the week. 13
Indicator 3. Guide 14
Guide Look-fors 15
3A. Data-Driven. Teachers use knowledge of students' skills and abilities to create lesson objectives. 15
3B. Specific. Teachers create specific lesson objectives that help students master the larger standards. 15
3C. Progressive. Teachers create lesson objectives that build from lower-order to higher-order critical-thinking skills. 16
Indicator 4. Differentiate 16
Differentiate Look-fors 17
4A. Diverse Delivery. Teachers incorporate a mix of whole-group, small-group and independent practice into daily lessons. 17

sample

4B. Daily Structures. Teachers incorporate routines and structures that promote engaged, independent learners. 18

4C. Individualized Instruction. Teachers deliberately select strategies, resources and tools to meet the needs of all students. 18

Indicator 5. Explain 19

Explain Look-fors 19

5A. Essential Questions. Teachers use essential questions to frame student learning and make real-world connections. 19

5B. "I Can" Statements. Teachers connect "I Can" statements to prior learning, current learning and long-term learning goals. 20

5C. Lesson Objectives. Teachers connect lesson objectives to "I Can" statements. 20

5D. Student Explanations. Students identify and explain the connection between standards and real-world application. 21

5E. Student Work. Students' work demonstrates an understanding of the context for learning. 21

5F. Student Self-Reflection. Students self-monitor their progress to standards. 21

Indicator 6. Assess 22

Assess Look-fors 22

6A. Alignment. Teachers align assessments to learning targets. 22

6B. Multiple Measures. Teachers use a variety of assessment approaches to measure progress. 23

6C. Multiple Checkpoints. Teachers include formative or summative assessments in daily lessons. 23

6D. Teacher Self-Reflection. Teachers use data from formative and summative assessments to make instructional adjustments. 24

Indicator 7. Apply 24

Apply Look-fors 25

7A. Nonfiction Integration. Teachers meet or exceed Common Core guidelines for the incorporation of informational texts. 25

7B. Word Study. Teachers use strategies that strengthen academic and domain-specific vocabulary. 25

7C. Attention to Text. Teachers require students to use evidence from the text to support understanding. 26

7D. Text Complexity. Teachers select complex texts based on individual students' abilities. 27

Indicator 8. Connect 27

Connect Look-fors 28

8A. Multidisciplinary Planning. Teachers collaborate with other staff to implement multidisciplinary education. 28

Sample

8B. Cross-Curricular Resources. Teachers integrate cross-curricular resources to address ELA standards and learning targets. 28

8C. 21st-Century Skills. Teachers incorporate strategies that promote 21st-century skills in daily lessons. 29

8D. Cultural Responsiveness. Teachers create inclusive classrooms using culturally responsive content and pedagogy that honors students' interests and cultural experiences. 29

8E. Project-Based. Students apply knowledge of standards to create real-world artifacts. 30

Observing and Assessing With the IF Rubric 30

Glossary of Terms 34

References 36

Sample

Using This Resource

Several observation tools and frameworks — that are both research- and evidence-based — were reviewed to support the development of The Instructional Framework (IF) and IF Rubric. The IF Rubric Guide supplements the latter documents by:

- Sharing the rationale behind developing the IF Rubric
- Explaining in detail the indicators and look-fors (backed by research)
- Providing suggestions on how to use the IF Rubric to observe and assess teacher effectiveness

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The Instructional Framework Conceptual Foundations

Effective leadership and staff are critical components for any successful organization. Strong leaders make strong schools, and research has determined that principals and teachers are the most significant school factors influencing student achievement (Leithwood et al., 2004; Wallace Foundation, 2012; School Leaders Network, 2014). Unfortunately, frequent administrator and teacher turnover — churn — can significantly disrupt and critically impact school culture, operations and educational programming (Harris, 2012; Mascall and Leithwood, 2010; Streshly and Gray, 2008). Both principals and teachers cite lack of support and lack of training as key reasons for leaving their positions or careers (Duncan et al., 2011; Mendels, 2012; School Leaders Network, 2014; Streshly and Gray, 2008).

Organizational viability depends upon visionary, strategic leadership. In school settings — regardless of the age or grade level the organization serves — educational administrators must be knowledgeable and capable of implementing and monitoring high-performance standards and systems for school operations and programming. Frequent turnover and the lack of intentional succession planning impact the effectiveness of school operations, disrupt educational programming and weaken school culture, making any significant school change initiative difficult.

Investing in capacity-building for school leadership has the potential to decrease the turnover rate, increase organizational effectiveness, support sustainability and positively impact student success. The School Leaders Network (2014) identifies the influence of school administrators: “Successful school leaders can affect whole systems of teachers, and these teachers in turn affect the learning and achievement of their students.”

Unfortunately, research has indicated that consistent and capable educational leadership is a national concern. This challenge is apparent across public and faith-based education systems. Nationwide, half of new principals leave their role within the first three years (School Leaders Network, 2014). This organizational effectiveness is a concern, and research has indicated a direct correlation between a principal’s leadership and student success — as much as 25% of a school’s impact on student achievement and performance (Leithwood et al., 2004; Marzano, 2005; Wallace Foundation, 2012).

Finding and retaining effective teachers is also critical. Teachers have the most significant and direct impact on preparing students to succeed in the classroom and as citizens (National Commission, 2003; School Leaders Network, 2014). One source suggests teachers affect an average of 3,000 children over the course of their careers (Tornio, 2017); therefore, they must be equipped with the skills necessary to deliver high-quality instruction that effectively supports learning for students with diverse needs.

Retaining qualified, effective teachers is also a national concern. According to research on teacher attrition, one-third of new teachers left the field after three years, and one-half of new teachers left after five years (National Commission, 2003). In addition, the National Center for Education Statistics reported that in 2012, 16% of teachers either changed schools or left the field. Teachers typically leave because 1) the “systems in which they work do not support their

Sample

efforts" to achieve the learning impacts they or others expect, and/or 2) they experience isolation in classroom environments (National Commission, 2003).

Even when teacher retention is not a concern, frequent administrator turnover and ever-changing expectations can lead to stagnating instructional practices and teacher silos. Without structured accountability, exposure to evolving best practices and collaboration with other educators, providing quality and effective instruction becomes a challenge.

The Instructional Framework for 21st-Century Educators (IF) was developed to introduce and train administrators and teachers on research- and evidence-based classroom best practices. The IF — developed by pulling together experts and practitioners in public, private and faith-based education — establishes a research-based scope and sequence for teaching English and language arts content. It clearly articulates learning expectations related to student content and skill mastery from kindergarten through eighth grade.

To best instruct and support the whole child, the IF drew upon Common Core State Standards, the Partnership for 21st Century Skills, and the Collaborative for Academic, Social, and Emotional Learning competencies. The IF not only provides teachers with unified nationwide grade-level expectations but also demonstrates how these expectations build upon one another with each progressing school year. The IF is intended to enhance existing practices and equip teachers to plan and deliver standards-based instruction that promotes the 4 Cs of 21st-century learning (communication, collaboration, critical thinking and creativity) and encourages different means of learning.

The IF Rubric was developed to provide objective, measurable feedback to teachers and administrators on their progress toward implementing and mastering the IF best practices. The IF Rubric Indicators are based on an extensive study of existing K–8 teacher quality rubrics, including the Danielson Framework Rubric, Marzano Teacher Evaluation Model, Understanding by Design Rubric, New Teacher Project Core Teaching Rubric and Insight Core Framework Rubric.

Like the IF on which it is based, the IF Rubric:

- Was collaboratively developed
- Empowers teachers to implement a research-based scope and sequence for English and language arts
- Guides teachers to clearly articulate learning expectations related to student content and skill mastery from kindergarten through eighth grade
- Aligns with the Common Core Standards and integrates Partnership for 21st Century Skills and the Collaborative for Academic, Social, and Emotional Learning competencies

IF Rubric indicators and look-fors are the same for teachers of students from kindergarten through eighth grade. These best practices do not change based on the age of the students. However, evidence of quality for teachers of students at different grade levels may look different.

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IF Rubric Indicators

The following are the eight indicators and the accompanying look-fors assessed using the IF Rubric.

1. Reflect

2. Plan

3. Guide

4. Differentiate

5. Explain

6. Assess

7. Apply

8. Connect

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Indicator 1. Reflect

Teachers are actively reflecting on their practice.

Reflective teachers are continuous learners who seek out, test and measure new ideas and approaches to inform and enhance their curriculum design, delivery, implementation and assessment. Reflective teachers are metacognitive; they take the time to think about their thinking and their practice:

> Metacognition, with its emphasis on self-conscious action, is not normally associated with teacher development. Instead, the talk is about “teacher training,” which carries the implication that teaching is a mechanical matter of implementing technical acts in a predetermined manner. Training, however, seldom works because classroom teaching cannot be predicted in advance. There are no specific answers, knowledge is situational, and teachers must make “on-the-spot” responses to students’ emerging understandings. Effectiveness in such a fluid environment requires teachers to “know where to be and what to do at the right time” (Berliner), an ability Bransford, Brown, and Cocking called “adaptive expertise.” (Duffy, 299)

Effective teacher reflective practice involves setting goals (Kuijk et al.); using objective, formative data to understand student progress (Carlson et al.); adding, adapting or eliminating strategies based on student engagement and progress (Allen et al.); and collaborating with instructional leaders to maximize their professional learning and student achievement (Kraft et al.). These reflective practices have been found to impact teacher practice and student achievement in studies of early childhood through secondary classrooms, with novice and experienced educators instructing students of different races, ethnicities, genders and socioeconomic backgrounds, and in subjects including reading, math and science. Effective teacher reflection has the power to improve effectiveness for all teachers with all students in all subjects.

Reflect Look-fors

- 1A. Continuous Learning. Teachers apply new learnings to demonstrate growth toward professional and school-wide goals.
- 1B. Data-Driven Reflection. Teachers measure and document their own and students' progress toward professional and school-wide goals.
- 1C. Data-Driven Planning. Teachers make and adjust instructional decisions based on reflections.
- 1D. Maximizing 1:1 Time. Teachers use independent reflection and prework to maximize coaching conversations.
- 1E. Collaborative Coaching. Teachers actively participate in reflection during coaching conversations.

1A. Continuous Learning. Teachers apply new learnings to demonstrate growth toward professional and school-wide goals.

The reflective teacher systematically selects a high-leverage focus area and consistently applies learning from readings, coaching or corporate professional development through action research. Professional development and a commitment to lifelong learning are needed to excel in every profession. A commitment to professional growth can help teachers develop engaging and fun standards-based activities that address diverse students' interests and learning styles, integrate impactful new technologies into their instructional practice, and ultimately ensure that all students achieve their goals at high levels. The reflective teacher seeks out targeted professional learning opportunities and designs, implements and evaluates action research in their classroom to meet the learning needs and interests of the students they serve. Reflective teachers utilize and integrate learnings from a variety of sources to improve their practice: school-based corporate professional development; professional association conferences; local and regional workshops; and trainings on topics of relevance, teacher learning communities and one-to-one job-embedded instructional coaching. At the high end, reflective teachers conduct systematic, data-driven action research to test their ideas with their own students and use their findings to adjust and improve both their own practice and student achievement.

According to educators Hall and Simeral (2015), a reflective teacher has the following qualities:

> [They are] oriented toward a learning goal (e.g., learning strategies to better address the needs of individual learners) rather than a performance goal (e.g., increasing the percentage of proficient students on a unit assessment) . . . by working harder, smarter,

Sample

> and more thoughtfully and by truly becoming engaged in the growth process . . . [They] build . . . capacity for success—as both reflective practitioners and instructional deliverers. (p. 19)

Growth in the ability to think, reason, consider, weigh, ponder, assess, deliberate, reflect and act on that reflection takes time, energy and commitment. This involves working collaboratively with peers, administrators, mentors and coaches (Hall and Simeral, 2015).

1B. Data-Driven Reflection. Teachers measure and document their own and students' progress toward professional or school-wide goals.

The reflective teacher can see the impact they have on student learning and use assessment to inform their next steps (Hattie and Zierer, 2017). They "implement effective instructional strategies with intentionality and consistency" (Hall and Simeral, 2015, 93).

The reflective teacher objectively measures and documents their own and students' progress as a result of their efforts and shares results with peers. Reflective teachers have an internal locus of control. They understand that their instructional planning, preparation, delivery, assessment and evaluation directly impact their students' achievement. Because of this self-accountability reflective teachers regularly take time to evaluate student achievement using a variety of data and objectively analyze their own practice to understand which elements of their instructional practice are effective and which are not in achieving their expected outcomes. Reflective teachers use both quantitative (e.g., numeric) and qualitative (e.g., perception) data to evaluate their effectiveness. In addition to more traditional achievement metrics, reflective teachers seek input from their students, families, peers and instructional leaders on their practice, and they make changes based on what they learn. Finally, reflective teachers are not arbitrary in their evaluation. They utilize the standards, grade-level benchmarks and expectations, and school-wide goals to set their bar and work systematically toward reaching it.

1C. Data-Driven Planning. Teachers make and adjust instructional decisions based on reflections.

The reflective teacher, according to Danielson, can "comprehensively 'see' what is going on in the classroom, in the plan book and in all measures of learning" (Hall and Simeral, 2015, p. 40).

According to Hattie, "Highly reflective teachers know that they have a powerful and immediate effect on student learning, and if students are struggling, then they can swiftly get them back on track by intervening in calculated and meaningful ways" (Hall and Simeral, 2015, p. 41).

The reflective teacher consistently differentiates instructional decisions based on accurate, objective reflections on prior effectiveness with individual students and the class as a whole. Reflective teachers don't just use their theoretical and content knowledge to inform pedagogical practice. Effective teachers use regular reflection as a tool to make and adjust instructional decisions. Reflective teachers see their own practice through. Using video, reflective teachers regularly observe and analyze their content delivery, students' grasp of content, their own and students' level of excitement and engagement, and connection with individual students and their class. Reflective teachers assess their lesson's effectiveness not by how closely they stuck to their written plan but by how many of their students were meaningfully engaged and met the lesson's objectives. Based on their reflection, teachers draw on their own skill and knowledge bank and that of their peers and instructional leaders to make the necessary changes that will improve learning for their students.

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