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Using Student Voice to Inform ESSA School Improvement

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Every Student Succeeds Act

- Based on a system of meaningful differentiation, states must establish a methodology for identifying low-performing schools.

- Beginning in the 2017-18 school year, and at least once every three years thereafter, states are required to identify a statewide category of schools for comprehensive support and improvement (CSI) and targeted support and improvement (TSI).

- Each state education agency (SEA) is required to notify each local education agency (LEA) of any schools identified for CSI or TSI.

- LEAs are responsible for developing and implementing a plan for each CSI school identified.

- Any school identified for CSI that fails to improve within a state-determined number of years (not to exceed four years) shall be faced with more rigorous state-determined action.
ESSA

Indicators used by each state to establish a system for Annual Meaningful Differentiation

- Not less than the lowest-performing 5 percent of all Title I schools
  - All public high schools in the state failing to graduate one-third or more of their students
- Any such school in which any subgroup of students is consistently under-performing

Comprehensive support and improvements schools

Targeted support and improvements schools
How do schools improve?

Whole-school improvement occurs when effective means are found to do three things simultaneously:

- Build adult capacity and mindsets
- Enhance student supports and motivations
- Create school structures that enable a shared mission and continuous improvement towards enabling all adults and students to succeed

The real question of school improvement is: How to do this given the existing circumstances, challenges, capacities, and experiences of a school?
Engaging Students in School Improvement

- Discussion: What opportunities are available at your school for student voice/engagement?

- Ideas for inviting student voice into your planning process
  - Survey students
  - Shadow students
  - Hold student focus groups
  - Create student profiles
Surveys

- Some great instruments out there!
- Some surveys are free; some cost money.
- It’s worth considering if a district already has a survey tool—perhaps your school just hasn’t been administering it to students or there was a low return rate.
- Think about whether you are looking for a diagnostic tool or a progress tracker (a survey you would administer annually to track growth).
Shadowing Students

- How do we best understand who our students are and how they experience school?
- Pick a student to spend the day shadowing.
- Record your observations. Do not evaluate; instead strive for immersion.
- Reflect and question all your assumptions.
- Check out www.shadowastudent.org for more resources and ideas!
Student Focus Groups

- Limit group participation—small groups are better!
- Make sure only one person talks at a time. Don’t allow interruptions.
- Make sure no one dominates the conversation and everyone has a chance to speak.
- Ask neutral, open-ended questions. Avoid binary yes/no questions and leading questions.
- Opposing perspectives are welcomed but stay focused on the idea—not the person expressing it.
Student Focus Groups: Interview with Empathy

Introduce yourself and the project

Build rapport
Evoke stories
Explore emotions
Question statements

Thank you and wrap-up
Create Student Profiles

- Through interviews, shadows, and surveys, schools can develop a portfolio of profiles that reflects the composition of their student population and will help explore both the variety and nuances of their prospective students’ experiences.
- Use these profiles to inform all of your work, even your goal setting.
- Ensure that every student profile is being well served in the decisions you are making.
Model for Student Profiles

This is a profile of: ________

What experiences in and out of school has this student had?

What are the student's expectations personally and for learning?

What has this student learned—in and out of school—to know, do, or be?

What goals, ambitions, and dreams does this student have?
Engaging Students in School Improvement

- Creating space for student voice and an active role in problem solving
  - Student Ambassadors: staff recruit students to play new leadership roles in the school; not the typical student government or student council representatives; act as an ongoing source of information/reality check for staff
  - Attendance “Audit”: students help school design solutions for chronic absenteeism; could provide a model for how to engage students around a specific issue
  - Classroom Circles: balance the air time between adults and youth; provide opportunities for new/different ways to interact; build community and trust
Practice a Classroom Circle

- Classroom circles are often conducted at the opening and closing of a school day or an individual class.
- Their purpose is to build community and trust, create a sense of open dialogue, and ultimately support restorative practices.
- At your tables, one participant should volunteer to act as facilitator and pick a question off the sample check-in document on your table.
- Take turns going around the table and answering the question. A person can pass if not ready to participate.
- Then debrief the process:
  - Any insights into the effect of classroom circles after participating in this circle?
  - What would circles do for students? For teachers?
  - Would classroom circles be hard to implement at your school (or do you do anything similar now)? Why or why not?
Who is Talent Development Secondary?

- Talent Development Secondary is a national school partner and a leader in secondary school reform housed at the Johns Hopkins University School of Education. Its mission is to provide evidence-based models, tools, and supports to the most challenged secondary schools serving the most vulnerable students across the country.

- Built on four pillars of school success, Talent Development Secondary is a partner in districts, schools, and classrooms. On-site staff provide consistent help in implementing the schedule, curriculum, and instruction that will make a difference in how students learn and teachers teach. Professional development is continual, consistent, and specific to the needs of each school and its staff.

- Talent Development Secondary supports schools in the use of real-time early warning indicator data, validated by the research of Dr. Robert Balfanz and predictive of on-time high school graduation and postsecondary success, to structure student interventions and supports.
Questions? Thank you!

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Organizations that we work with:

Everyone Graduates Center: http://new.every1graduates.org

Attendance Works: http://www.attendanceworks.org

MENTOR: http://www.mentoring.org

My Brother’s Keeper Alliance: https://www.mbkalliance.org

Jobs for the Future: http://jff.org

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