

## Coalition of Essential Schools Benchmarks Principles in Practice

---

Section I Classroom Practice What does a CES classroom look like?	Section II Organizational Practices What organizational practices support and enable the classroom practices?
Culturally responsive pedagogy*	Access, opportunity, and postsecondary preparation
Differentiated instruction	Family engagement and community partnerships
Essential questions	Continuous school improvement
Habits of mind and heart	Culture of fairness and trust
Interdisciplinary curriculum	Maximizing resources for equitable outcomes
Performance-based assessment	Professional learning community
Student-centered teaching and learning	Transformational leadership

\* Socioeconomic status, race, gender, culture, sexual orientation, religion, able-ness, age

The benchmarks can be found on-line at  
[http://www.essentialschools.org/pub/ces\\_docs/schools/  
 benchmarks/benchmarks.html](http://www.essentialschools.org/pub/ces_docs/schools/benchmarks/benchmarks.html)

## Section I

### Classroom Practice

#### What does a CES classroom look like?

**Overall framework for descriptors:**

**Transforming:** Practice is reflected in student outcomes.

**Developing:** Practice is reflected in teacher planning and instruction.

**Early:** Learning about and planning for the practice has become important to the teaching staff.

Common Principle	Classroom Practices
Learning to use one's mind well	Essential questions Habits of mind and heart Interdisciplinary curriculum Performance-based assessment Student-centered teaching and learning
Less is more; depth over coverage	Essential questions Habits of mind and heart Interdisciplinary curriculum
Goals apply to all students	Culturally responsive pedagogies Differentiated instruction Performance-based assessment
Personalization	Culturally competent pedagogies Differentiated instruction Student-centered teaching and learning
Student-as-worker, teacher-as-coach	Interdisciplinary curriculum Student-centered teaching and learning
Demonstration of mastery	Performance-based assessment
A tone of decency and trust	Culturally responsive pedagogies Habits of mind and heart
Commitment to the entire school	
Resources dedicated to teaching and learning	
Democracy and equity	Culturally responsive pedagogies Differentiated instruction

 <p>Coalition of Essential Schools</p>	<p><b>Culturally Responsive Pedagogy</b></p>	<p><b><i>CES Common Principles</i></b></p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>▪ <b>Goals apply to all students</b></li> <li>▪ <b>Personalization</b></li> <li>▪ <b>A tone of decency and trust</b></li> <li>▪ <b>Democracy and equity</b></li> </ul>
<p>Culture is central to learning. It plays a role not only in communicating and receiving information but also in shaping the thinking process of groups and individuals. A pedagogy that acknowledges, responds to, and celebrates fundamental cultures offers full, equitable access to education for students from all cultures and prepares students to live in a pluralistic society. <b>Culturally responsive teaching</b> is a pedagogy that recognizes the importance of including students’ cultural references in all aspects of learning (Ladson-Billings, 1994).</p>		
<p><b>Benchmark Descriptors</b></p>		
<p><b>Transforming: Student thinking and work reflects a depth of the knowledge, skills, and values needed to live in a pluralistic society.</b></p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• Culturally responsive teaching <b>uses the cultural knowledge, prior experiences, and performance styles of diverse students to make learning more appropriate and effective for them</b>; it teaches to and through the strengths of these students.</li> <li>• Culturally responsive teaching <b>acknowledges the legitimacy of the cultural heritages (language, history, traditions) of different racial, ethnic, class, religious, and gender groups</b>, both as legacies that affect students’ dispositions, attitudes, and approaches to learning and as worthy content to be taught in the formal curriculum. Culturally responsive teaching builds on and expands students’ social capital. It provides students with examples of difference, such as building intergenerational relationships.</li> <li>• Culturally responsive teaching <b>builds bridges of meaningfulness between home and school</b> experiences, between academic abstractions and lived sociocultural realities, and between school experiences and youth culture.</li> <li>• Specific culturally responsive pedagogical practices include an <b>anti-bias pedagogy</b>, positive perspectives on parents and families of culturally and linguistically diverse students, culturally mediated instruction that teaches students to know and praise their own and each other’s cultural heritage and historic contributions, communicates high expectations, and uses a <b>wide variety of active instructional strategies</b> that are connected to different learning styles. Culturally responsive teaching <b>incorporates multicultural information, resources, and materials</b> in all the subjects and skills routinely taught in schools.</li> <li>• Culturally responsive teachers develop intellectual, social, emotional, and political learning by <b>using cultural referents to impart knowledge, skills, and attitudes</b>. Culturally responsive teachers realize not only the importance</li> </ul>		

of academic achievement but also that of **maintaining of cultural identity and heritage.**

- Culturally responsive teaching creates **curriculum** that invites students to explore complex identities and consider racial group experiences, analyzes opportunity denial, power, privilege and social stratification, represents a diverse range of people thoroughly and complexly, and discusses history accurately and thoroughly.
- The school community uses best practices in **language acquisition** to support academic development and support in both English and native languages.
- Culturally responsive teaching is **transformative** in that it involves helping students to develop the knowledge, skills, and values needed to become social critics who can make reflective decisions and implement their decisions in effective personal, social, political, and economic action.
- Culturally responsive teaching guides students in understanding that no single version of “the truth” is total and permanent. It **does not solely prescribe mainstream ways of knowing and making meaning.** Instead, it presents multiple perspectives on a situation or idea and supports student understanding of them all. Culturally responsive teaching is a movement against and beyond boundaries of traditional ways of knowing. It is that movement that makes education the practice of freedom.

**Developing: Practice is reflected in teacher planning and instruction.**

- Staff development has occurred or been planned in which teachers explore their personal histories and experiences as well as the personal histories and experiences of their colleagues and students.
- Staff learn about the history and experiences of diverse groups in order to understand the different ways historical experience has shaped attitudes and perspectives of various groups. By learning about other groups, teachers begin to see differences between their own values and those of others.
- Staff visit students’ families and communities in order to view them as social and cultural beings connected to a complex social and cultural network. Further, these visits are intended to give staff insight into their students’ attitudes and beliefs and help staff see how they can use the community as resources that will contribute to the educational growth of their students.
- Staff understand how the educational system has historically fostered the achievement of one segment of the school population and that the mono-cultural values of schools have fostered biases in curriculum development and pedagogical practices that have been detrimental to the achievement of students from culturally and linguistically diverse backgrounds.
- Teachers validate students’ cultural identity in classroom practices and instructional materials by introducing material that is culturally supportive of their students.

**Early: Learning about and planning for the practice has become important to the teaching staff.**

- Staff development has occurred or been planned around culturally responsive pedagogy beginning with teacher self-reflection on personal attitudes and beliefs.
- Staff begin to develop an appreciation of diversity, viewing diversity as the norm. This entails a respect for differences and a willingness to teach from this perspective.



## Differentiated Instruction

### ***CES Common Principles***

- **Goals apply to all students**
- **Personalization**
- **Democracy and equity**

To **differentiate instruction** is to recognize students' varying background knowledge, readiness, language, preferences in learning, and interests, and to react responsively. Differentiated instruction addresses the needs of students of differing abilities and learning styles in the same class. The intent of differentiating instruction is to provide multiple access points for diverse learners to maximize growth and individual success by meeting each student where he or she is and assisting in the learning process from that point. Differentiated Instruction is a series of essential strategies for working in heterogeneous classrooms and eliminating tracking.

### **Benchmark Descriptors**

#### **Transforming: Student learning outcomes reflect high degrees of complexity.**

- **Assignments are differentiated based on content, skill, and process** so as to align all tasks and objectives to the learning goals of each individual student. The idea is to identify the next instructional step for learners entering at varying levels.
- **Students work in multiple groupings** and move between them fluidly. Learners interact and work together as they develop knowledge of new content. Based on the content, project, and ongoing evaluations, grouping and regrouping is a dynamic process. Teachers use a variety of diagnostic assessments to help them group students equitably. Teachers monitor student group participation to prevent de facto tracking and to address inequities.
- The school supports the **inclusion** of all students, including English-language learners and special needs students, in regular academic classrooms through the use of differentiated instruction as well as other best practices, such as dual-certified teachers and individualized learning plans.
- **Instruction is concept-focused and principle-driven.** The instructional concepts are broad-based. Teachers focus on the concepts, principles, and skills that all students should learn, and they can adjust instruction to meet the needs of a diverse set of learners.
- **Students have multiple means of representation** to support instructional content and provide various ways of acquiring and constructing knowledge.
- **All tasks have different access points** for student engagement with the content that tap into learners' interests, offer appropriate academic challenges, and increase motivation.
- **Student demonstrations of knowledge are varied.** A well-designed student project has varied expectations and requirements and allows for multiple means for students to demonstrate what they know, multiple types of assessment, and multiple

methods of feedback.

- **Students learn from teachers' use of assessments** that inform rather than merely measure instruction. Assessment occurs before, during, and following the instructional episode, and helps teachers pose questions regarding students' needs and optimal learning.

**Developing: Teacher planning and instructional strategies reflect an understanding of best practice of differentiated instruction.**

- Teachers use diagnostics frequently to identify skill levels for new units, and to intentionally group students for each unit.
- Almost all class work assignments and readings are leveled by at least one of the following: content, skill, or process.
- Formative assessment is used frequently to gauge learning, and it is the basis for discussions about students.
- Summative assessments are leveled by skill, content, or process.

**Early: The critical need for effective differentiated instruction in daily practice has moved from leadership to staff.**

- Staff development has occurred or been planned around differentiated instruction.
- Diagnostics are being used or beginning to be used to identify different skill levels.
- Teachers are testing the use of intentional groupings or pairings and recording data on the effectiveness of the practice.
- Teachers and administrators recognize that tracking does not serve students well.
- Some teachers have designed "levels" of assignments. Sometimes the assignments are separated by content, sometimes by process.
- Some teachers are making a distinction between formative and summative assessments.
- Conversations move toward discussing skills and understanding rather than work habits.



## Essential Questions

### *CES Common Principles*

- **Learning to use one's mind well**
- **Emphasize depth over breadth: less is more**

**Essential questions** are the starting point to develop curricula. Curriculum and courses should be organized not around answers but around big ideas—questions and problems to which content represents answers. Essential questions on every level—from the most encompassing schoolwide questions to the specific question posed in a particular unit of a particular course—should shape the way students learn to think critically for themselves. Consequently, essential questions are related to the school's goals: that each student master a limited number of essential skills and areas of knowledge (see Habits of Mind and Heart).

### Benchmark Descriptors

**Transforming: Student and adult work reflect depth and higher-order thinking prompted by essential questions.**

- **Curricula are aligned around limited numbers of essential questions** (across the school and the various disciplines, and in the classroom), so that student learning is focused and deep.
- **Student experiences and work** are consistently connected to essential questions.
- Essential questions are **developmentally appropriate, and both relevant and authentic in scope**, and they are integral to the enduring understandings of the content area. Essential questions are relevant to **students' lives and passions** and ask students to connect the topic to experiences, observations, feelings, or situations significant in their lives. These include issues of social justice, race, culture, and community.
- **Students understand and develop essential questions** for further independent exploration in the context of classwork and for summative evaluative projects.
- Essential questions **drive assessment** methods. Students demonstrate mastery by having **authentic, real-world** impact on their environment. Assessment rubrics are designed to support their exploration.

**Developing: Student work is directed by essential questions.**

- Essential questions guide planning for course and are visible in classroom.
- Students are aware of essential questions.
- Students' work is related to essential questions but not overwhelmed by them. (Too many essential questions cause students to lose focus during the inquiry process.)
- Enduring understandings of content areas are tied loosely to essential questions, but assessment does not intentionally evaluate student understanding of the essential question.

**Early: The importance of essential questions in directing learning has moved from leadership to the staff.**

- Staff development has occurred or been planned around using essential questions to develop student-centered curricula.
- Teachers develop essential questions to guide planning of specific units or lessons.
- Some essential questions are still too limited or too broad, and some have yes-or-no answers that do not allow for student exploration into topic.
- Some essential questions still encourage rote answers, and some assessments still measure content recall rather than content and concept understanding.



## Habits of Mind and Heart (HOMH)

### ***CES Common Principles***

- **Using one's mind well**
- **Emphasize depth over breadth: less is more**
- **A tone of decency and trust**

The school should focus on helping young people learn to use their minds well. Habits of mind and heart are ways that a school can articulate the thinking and emotional dispositions that students need, allowing it to focus its resources. Consequently, schools should not be “comprehensive” if such a claim is made at the expense of the school’s central intellectual purpose. **Habits of mind** are a set of thinking dispositions that help people develop their critical and creative thinking skills. They are the characteristics of what intelligent people do about problems whose resolution is not immediately apparent. That is, these are the mental habits individuals can develop to render their thinking and learning more self-regulated. The habits of mind are not designed to be thinking tools, rather they are designed to be dispositions adopted when using a thinking tool. **Habits of heart** are a collection of emotional dispositions designed to help people develop their social-emotional intelligence. Habits of heart help people care for, identify with, and honor others, and respect the emotions and rights of others and how they see the world. The phrase also describes an ability, capacity, or skill to perceive, assess, and manage one’s own emotions and those of other individuals and groups.

### **Benchmark Descriptors**

#### **Transforming: Student thinking and work reflects HOMH.**

- **Students intentionally frame their work and projects with** and can articulate the benefits of shaping their work with HOMH.
- Student work and discussions (formal and informal) reflect an understanding of HOMH and provide specific examples of how a focus on HOMH has **supported academic achievement and personal growth**.
- Student and teacher **problem solving reflects HOMH**, and both transparently use HOMH language in discussion.
- **Teacher planning consistently reflects HOMH components**—for units and individual lessons. Rubrics for summative assessments use the HOMH as a framework to track student learning and analytical skill development.
- **Assignments consistently give students experience with practicing or applying** an individual habit or a combination of habits.
- **Evidence** of HOMH is reflected in displayed student work and footprints around the building.

**Developing: Teacher work reflects a focus on embedding HOMH into student work.**

- Instruction and project planning reflect HOMH components, including a metacognitive component:
  - Units guided by an essential question requiring comprehensive understanding of a topic .
  - Student interest and topic significance is the driving force of inquiry.
  - Emphasis is placed on uncovering evidence to support a particular point of view, rather than the memorization of facts linked to a topic.
  - Connections are made between content within a discipline and in related disciplines (requiring co-planning or interdisciplinary units).
  - Reflection on personal development as a learner is included in student experience.
- Assignments incorporate HOMH consistently, and assessment rubrics are guided by the habits.
- HOMH footprints are clearly visible throughout the building.
- Teachers and students use HOMH language during lessons.

**Early: Planning has extended from leadership to teachers.**

- Staff development has occurred or been planned around HOMH.
- A visible focus on HOMH is evident around the building. Some teachers are actively using the principles in a particular unit, lesson, or assignment to test and collect data on their effectiveness for student learning.
- There is recognition by teachers that student interest is linked to motivation, understanding, and development. Teachers begin to weave student choice and interest into lessons by attempting to demonstrate significance and relevance of topics.
- Teachers purposefully choose units that have opportunities for a deeper study of the content. Lessons and assignments begin to focus on understanding the interconnectedness of ideas, rather than fact memorization.
- Teachers are beginning to design assessments that target specific thinking skills (perhaps using Bloom's Taxonomy to craft higher-order thinking questions).

 <p>Coalition of Essential Schools</p>	<h2>Interdisciplinary Curriculum</h2>	<p style="text-align: center;"><b><i>CES Common Principles</i></b></p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>▪ <b>Learning to use one’s mind well</b></li> <li>▪ <b>Emphasize depth over breadth: less is more</b></li> <li>▪ <b>Teacher-as-coach, student-as-worker</b></li> </ul>
<p>A school’s goals should be simple: that each student master a limited number of essential skills and areas of knowledge. While these skills and areas will, to varying degrees, reflect the traditional academic disciplines, the program’s design should be shaped by the intellectual and imaginative powers and competencies that the students need, rather than by subjects as conventionally defined. An <b>interdisciplinary curriculum</b> combines several school subjects into one active project or is organized to cut across subject-matter lines, bringing together various aspects of the curriculum into meaningful association. It focuses on broad areas of study since that is how children encounter subjects in the real world—combined in one activity. In the interdisciplinary curriculum, the planned learning experiences not only provide the learners with a unified view of commonly held knowledge (by learning models, systems, and structures) but also motivate and develop learners’ power to perceive new relationships and thus to create new models, systems, and structures. Interdisciplinary curriculum involves using the knowledge view and curricular approach that consciously applies methodology and language from more than one discipline to examine a central theme, issue, problem, topic, or experience.</p>		
<h3>Benchmark Descriptors</h3>		
<p><b>Transforming: Student thinking and work reflects an understanding of relationships and ideas across disciplines.</b></p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• Students explore multiple disciplines through the use of project-based learning or <b>other student-centered learning approaches</b>.</li> <li>• <b>Students examine multiple disciplines</b> for common skills, concepts, and ideas. <b>Students apply the habits of mind for reading, writing, and thinking</b> across the disciplines. Students make connections, pose questions, explore solutions as a means to engage in real-world scenarios and application transfer, and apply knowledge to different contexts and scenarios.</li> <li>• <b>Curriculum strands and themes</b> are the organizing principles around which the curriculum is built. They are broad—for example, Human Societies—and integrate content from multiple areas (academics, the arts, vocational programs), and are built around essential questions.</li> <li>• Students see <b>teachers working in different subject areas</b>, teaching in different classroom space and making similar points across subject areas.</li> <li>• Students use <b>multiple materials and resources</b>, including professional experts and networks, not just textbooks.</li> <li>• <b>Students work in flexible, cooperative groupings</b> to solve problems and analyze texts, demonstrating understanding of a task or concept through multiple perspectives.</li> <li>• Teachers have the <b>common planning time</b> necessary to work together to co-plan or co-teach the units, or both.</li> </ul>		

**Developing: Teacher work reflects a focus on creating interdisciplinary curriculum.**

- Curriculum is developed in which Thematic units are used as organizing principles.
- Teacher works as ‘coach’ facilitating active student learning.
- Staff have some common planning time or other professional development time to work together to develop integrated curricula.
- The linkage of similar topics, concepts or skills from two or more subject areas taught collaboratively with another teacher.
- **Teacher as generalist with the ability to teach interdisciplinary material alone, although they may plan with other teachers.**
- Teachers are developing cross-curriculum sub objectives within a given curriculum guide.
- Teachers are developing model lessons that include cross-curricular activities and assessments.
- Teachers are developing enrichment or enhancement activities with a cross-curricular focus including suggestions for cross-curricular “contacts” following each objective.
- Interdisciplinary curriculum uses essential questions to guide exploration across disciplines.
- Teachers are developing assessment activities that are cross-curricular in nature.

**Early: Planning has extended from leadership to teachers.**

- Staff development has occurred or been planned to develop integrated curricula.
- Staff have some common planning time or other professional development time to work together to develop integrated curricula.
- Teachers choose themes/concepts that have opportunities for collaboration and deeper exploration across curriculum areas. Lessons and assignments begin to focus on understanding the interconnectedness of ideas across academic disciplines, rather than fact memorization.
- Teachers cover similar topics in their concurrent lessons, but the material and projects are not integrated.
- A theme is more like a series of activities rather than a way to facilitate student learning and understanding of conceptual connections.
- The content from one subject area is used to augment or supplement the learning experience in another subject area.



## Performance-Based Assessment

### *CES Common Principles*

- **Learning to use one's mind well**
- **Goals apply to all students**
- **Demonstration of mastery**

While any assessment system should include multiple assessment types that are matched with the needs of teachers (to make decisions regarding instruction) and learners, demonstration of mastery on schoolwide outcomes and high-level competencies should be assessed through a performance-based system. A **performance-based assessment system** is an integrated approach to education that underpins the culture of a school and links together a number of factors:

- Curriculum
- Instruction
- Variety of student work over time
- Continuous assessment
- External oversight
- High standards
- Professional development

Using a performance-based assessment system requires that assessment must not stand apart from the day-to-day work and schooling, of every student; it must be continually incorporated into all activities. A performance-based assessment system requires students to engage in time-intensive, in-depth research projects and papers, to engage in rigorous performance tasks that require students to think like historians, solve problems like mathematicians, conduct experiments the way scientists do, critically interpret works of literature, and speak and write clearly and expressively. As in the time-honored tradition of the Ph.D. defense, students in a performance-based assessment system must orally present and defend completed work to external assessors.

### **Benchmark Descriptors**

#### **Transforming: Student work reflects a demonstration of mastery.**

- The project-based assessments are aligned with **schoolwide outcomes**. Students demonstrate mastery by having **authentic, real-world** impact on their environment that produces visible change.
- **Graduation-level performance-based tasks** are aligned with learning standards, and are in any of the following academic areas: analytic literary essay, social studies research paper, original science experiment, or application of higher-level mathematics.
- Performance-based assessments can be **embedded into courses, competency-based performance outside of classes, or both**.

- **Student outcomes are assessed** at multiple levels, scaffolding is explicit in supporting students to reach schoolwide student outcomes over the course of their career.
- **External evaluators** review student work: experts in various disciplines (such as writers, scientists, historians), other interested evaluators (such as teachers from other schools), and other students, parents, and school staff other than the teacher who assigned the work.
- The school engages in **formative and summative documentation**, such as transcripts of school history including attendance and grades. It has an intake process that includes interview and writing samples, plus cumulative documentation of attendance, course performance, tests, student reports, parent teacher conferences, and staff review of work patterns and work products.
- The school has **multiple strategies for supporting students**, such as feedback on written work, narrative reports, student-parent-teacher conferences, after-school homework labs, and peer tutoring.
- Students have **multiple ways to express and exhibit learning**, such as *writing*: literary essays, research papers, plays, poetry, lyrics; *oral presentations*: discussions, debates, dramatic performances, external presentations; *artistic renderings*: sculpture, painting, drawing, photography; and *production of artifacts*: three-dimensional representations, replicas, and working models.
- Students demonstrate mastery by taking information and applying it in different and unique ways and situations. They show the ability to **apply knowledge learned in innovative or new ways**.
- Presentations provide time for **probing and open-ended questions** that allow students to demonstrate what they know.
- Students are engaged in **active learning** through discussion-based classrooms, project-based assignments, original research, and experiment design.
- As the diploma is awarded when earned, the school’s program proceeds with **no strict age grading** and with **no system of credits** earned by “seat time”—time spent in class.

**Developing: Teacher-developed assessments enhance rather than interrupt student learning.**

- The school uses frequent student assessment to make formative and some summative judgments.
- Performance assessments are a significant part of grade and graduation promotion requirements.
- Teachers are assessment-literate and use assessment data to enhance their individual practice and further promote student learning.
- The school’s assessment system, built largely on curriculum-embedded assessment measures, is public (to peers, parents, and community members), valid, and reliable.
- The system uses balanced assessment methods including selected responses, constructed responses, performance assessment, and observation and personal communication.

**Early: Learning about and planning for assessment has become important to the teaching staff.**

- Staff development has occurred or been planned around the use of performance-based assessments.
- Some teachers use multiple methods of assessment and performance-based assessments.
- The assessments used are still rated only by the teacher and only for classroom grades.

	<p><b>Student-Centered Teaching and Learning</b></p>	<p><b><i>CES Common Principles</i></b></p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>▪ <b>Learning to use one’s mind well</b></li> <li>▪ <b>Personalization</b></li> <li>▪ <b>Student-as-worker, teacher-as-coach</b></li> </ul>
---	--	---

**Student-Centered Teaching and Learning** focuses on the needs, abilities, interests, and learning styles of the students and has many implications for the design of curriculum, course content, and interactivity of courses. Accordingly, a prominent pedagogy will be teacher-as-coach, to provoke students to learn how to learn and thus to teach themselves, rather than the more traditional teacher-centered learning with teacher-as-deliverer-of-instructional-services, which places the teacher at its center in an active role and students in a passive, receptive role. This pedagogy acknowledges student voice as central to the learning experience for every learner and requires students to be active, responsible participants in their own learning. To capitalize on this, teaching and learning should be personalized to the maximum feasible extent. Decisions about the details of the course of study, the use of students’ and teachers’ time, and the choice of teaching materials and specific pedagogies must be unreservedly placed in the hands of the staff and students.

**Benchmark Descriptors**

- Transforming: Practice is reflected in student outcomes.**
- **Students take leadership in classroom, present their work, and facilitate groups.** Students take ownership of their reading, writing, and learning to develop, test, and refine their thinking. Students engage in talk that is accountable to the text or task, the learning community, and standards of reasoning. Learning is negotiated and **directed by students**.
  - The **content and delivery of instruction is culturally responsive** and respects and builds on the diverse resources and experiences of learners in the classroom. The school community uses best practices in **language acquisition** to support academic development and support in both English and native languages.
  - **Students work in flexible, cooperative groupings** to solve problems and analyze texts to demonstrate understanding of a task or concept through multiple perspectives.
  - The school supports the **inclusion** of all students, including English-language learners and special needs students, in regular academic classrooms through the use of best practices, such as dual-certified teachers, differentiated instruction, qualified aides, and individualized learning plans.
  - **Students consistently develop their own reasoning around concepts and ideas** and can articulate the processes and thinking they engaged in while grappling with a task or idea. Students listen to one another as well as to their teachers, and they exchange different ideas to build upon and apply new learning and approaches to their own understanding of a concept or idea that increase in complexity.

- **Students apply the habits of mind for reading, writing, and thinking** in various genres and disciplines. Students make connections, pose questions, and explore solutions as a means to engage in real-world scenarios and application transfer. They apply knowledge to different contexts and scenarios.
- Talk and focus in all groupings use **multiple strategies**. Students use physical environment and discussions about group roles to explore various concepts and apply them to different scenarios or problems.
- Teachers plan the types of questions and prompts at **multiple entry points** throughout a lesson, which build students' understanding of, and engagement toward, concepts and ideas and their application to real-world scenarios. Each teacher has clear and measurable objectives for what students will know and be able to do as a result of a lesson.
- **The arts and vocational interests** are included in academic curriculum, increasing students' engagement, motivating students with a variety of learning styles to succeed in high school and pursue higher education, and developing students' academic and intellectual growth.
- Schools value the **health of all students**, teaching them positive ways to bring balance to life's challenges and a proactive, positive approach to wellness.
- Student work is collected in a **portfolio** representing a selection of performance. A portfolio may include a student's best pieces and the student's evaluation of the strengths and weaknesses of the pieces. It may also contain one or more works-in-progress that illustrate the creation of a product such as an essay evolving through various stages of conception, drafting, and revision.
- **Students are assessed** for process, group work, and product.
- Student voices are connected with adult allies (teachers, families, communities) toward the goal of improving student life, school culture, student communities, and students' overall development.
- **Examples** of student-centered teaching and learning practices include advisory, service learning, and project-based learning.

**Developing: Practice is reflected in teacher planning and instruction.**

- Thinking and discourse are thoughtful and extend ideas or develop new understanding.
- All students are challenged and supported in learning at their own level.
- Thinking and work is learning-based, not task-based.
- Teachers have clear and consistent expectations and supports for student learning, and students are clear as to what proficient work entails.
- Work is mostly rigorous. Students can articulate the how and why of their learning.

**Early: Learning about and planning for the practice has become important to the teaching staff.**

- Staff development has occurred or been planned around student-centered teaching and learning strategies.
- Teachers have begun to increase their expectations for student learning and engagement.
- Teachers have begun to recognize that they must connect learning outcomes to students needs.
- There is recognition that students need more support that they are receiving in the current practice and structure of the school.
- Work is still all task- or product-driven
- Assessment is limited to work habits and does not address learning.
- Planning revolves around content, not student engagement and understanding.

## Section II Organizational Practices

### What organizational practices support and enable the classroom practices?

**These organizational practices are grounded in equity and willingness to challenge inequity.**

**Overall framework for descriptors:**

**Transforming:** Practice is reflected in student outcomes

**Developing:** Practice is reflected in teacher planning and instruction.

**Early:** Learning about and planning for the practice has become important to the teaching staff.

Common Principle	Organizational Practices
Learning to use one's mind well	Access, opportunity, and postsecondary preparation
Less is more; depth over coverage	
Goals apply to all students	Access, opportunity, and postsecondary preparation Maximizing resources for equitable outcomes
Personalization	Access, opportunity, and postsecondary preparation
Student-as-worker, teacher-as-coach	
Demonstration of mastery	
A tone of decency and trust	Culture of fairness and trust Family engagement and community partnerships Transformational leadership
Commitment to the entire school	Culture of fairness and trust Continuous school improvement Family engagement and community partnerships Professional learning community Maximizing resources for equitable outcomes Transformational leadership
Resources dedicated to teaching and learning	Maximizing resources for equitable outcomes Professional learning community Transformational leadership
Democracy and equity	Access, opportunity, and postsecondary preparation Continuous school improvement Culture of fairness and trust Professional learning community Maximizing resources for equitable outcomes Transformational leadership

DRAFT

DRAFT

DRAFT



## Access, Opportunity, and Postsecondary Preparation

### *CES Common Principles*

- **Learning to use one's mind well**
- **Goals apply to all students**
- **Personalization**
- **Democracy and equity**

Schools need to diminish the historically predictive power of demographic data on high and equitable student achievement by increasing the achievement of all groups of students and dramatically accelerating the achievement of targeted groups of students. Schools **help all students set and achieve high goals** and provide them the ability to pursue postsecondary education along with support in that effort. They provide information on career pathways and encourage students to become lifelong learners. Schools provide a college-ready curriculum that **helps all students set and achieve high goals** and generates other important values, the skills and knowledge for engaging in **intellectual work** across various disciplines, the **desire for and expectation** to succeed in high school and beyond, and **the emotional competence to be resilient and adaptable** in living in the global economy of the twenty-first century.

### Benchmark Descriptors

#### **Transforming: Practice is reflected in equitable student outcomes.**

- The school prepares students for accessing both **postsecondary education and career pathways**. We expect that every child will graduate with the options to choose multiple pathways, including those leading to careers and postsecondary education.
- **All students** have the **opportunity to take college courses** and participate in extracurricular activities that will prepare them for college. **Student enrollment patterns** in all courses, early college options, and extracurricular activities **parallel student demographics as a whole**; course matriculation is not predictable based on ethnicity, gender, or other variables. Student enrollment patterns and participation in these courses and activities parallel student demographics as a whole. **There is no tracking.**
- High school **graduation requirements are aligned to college admission requirements** to ensure that all students are eligible for college upon graduation. **Elementary and middle school requirements** are created through backward planning to ensure that students at all grade levels have the skills and knowledge that will put them on a path toward college. **All courses align with college expectations** so that the instruction, skills, and assessments are focused on the skills and dispositions needed for college-level work. Each student receives the appropriate individual **support and academic preparation** needed to achieve college readiness.
- **Clear expectations of college-going** ensure that all students are prepared for a full range of postsecondary options. What it takes for students to be prepared for college is clearly defined and part of the daily school culture. This includes the development of necessary academic and intellectual skills, independent living, and social-emotional competence.
- Postsecondary preparation involves more than just supporting students' intellectual growth. It includes the development of

students' **social capital**—the ability to create, nurture, and build upon social relationships, and to understand the demands relevant to a variety of diverse social situations and institutional settings.

- **College information and resources** are regularly updated and readily available in centralized and known locations that are accessible to students, families, and faculty at all grade levels, Kindergarten through Grade 12. **Comprehensive college counseling** is available to support every student in navigating the college selection, application, and financial aid processes.
- The school has an **advisory program** to support students' exploration of and matriculation to postsecondary opportunities. The adviser is trained to support students through this process (college application, obtaining financial aid, and so on).
- Vocational programs and internships provide **examples of real-life adult work and adult models**. Students learn how to be adults by being with adults and receive invaluable expertise in real-world careers. Vocational programs also prepare students for certification requirements and postsecondary certification programs, as most vocational careers now require postsecondary training.
- **Family connections are an integral aspect of preparing students for postsecondary school success. Families are informed partners** in the process of supporting students through school and on to college. They are supported with opportunities to gain knowledge about the college process and become aware that all students can be college bound. Materials, resources, and programs about college access and college opportunities are readily available to families (in their home languages if possible) beginning in Kindergarten. **Parents are offered opportunities to attain their own B.A. or A.A. degrees**, hereby encouraging their children to be excited about doing the same.
- The school **builds relationships with local colleges** and ensure that its transcripts are acceptable by all colleges.
- **The school develops structures that support this work**, including some or all of the following: dual high school and college enrollment, middle college high schools, advisory, requiring college applications as a graduation requirement, counseling, field trips to college campuses, vocational programs, and family information nights.

**Developing: Practice is reflected in school and teaching planning and instruction.**

- The school begins to develop flexible scheduling and grouping patterns to allow better use of time to meet individual needs.
- The school uses a full inclusion model. Students have access to learning opportunities. Title 1, SPED, and bilingual services are equitably and adequately provided to all eligible students.
- The school is working toward elimination of rigid ability grouping and tracking ensure optimal access to learning and teaching for all students.
- Teachers have general discussions about postsecondary options with students in each class.
- Teachers have an awareness of college expectations and the skills and dispositions needed to succeed in college, and they use this insight to guide planning of the course.
- Support structures such as mentors, tutors, and study sessions are in place.
- “Higher level” courses (such as Honors, AP, and IB) are open to all students and have a diverse population of students.
- Remedial courses are only offered to prepare students for academically rigorous material, not as credit toward graduation.

**Early: Learning about and planning for the practice has become important to all staff.**

- Students are aware of postsecondary options through counselors.
- Higher-level courses are open to all students, but few students of color or low SES take such courses.
- Students and teachers are aware of courses needed for college entrance.



## Continuous School Improvement

### *CES Common Principles*

- **Commitment to the entire school**
- **Democracy and equity**

**Continuous school improvement** is the process cycle of school improvement with the major components of creating the vision, gathering data related to that vision, analyzing the data, planning the work of the school to align with the vision, implementing the strategies and action steps outlined in the plan, and gathering data to measure the impact of the intervention.

### Benchmark Descriptors

#### **Transforming: Practices reflect the ability to have meaningful dialogue about data and make changes that challenge inequity.**

- **A culture of collaborative inquiry** occurs where everyone contributes to a cumulative, purposeful, and positive effect on student learning. Structures and process exist to support shared leadership in which the entire staff has collective responsibility for student learning and engages in collaborative inquiry focused on continuous improvement to increase student achievement. This process starts with a shared vision.
- **Shared vision and mission:** The entire staff represents a collective voice when it comes to creating and maintaining an effective learning environment. The vision and mission are translated into everyday practice and the results of assessments inform the success of related school goals. Formal and frequent opportunities exist for staff to collaborate on success, challenges, and assessment results as they put into practice the vision and mission of the school. This effort includes the creation of schoolwide outcomes (what students should know and be able to do upon promotion and graduation). The vision and mission are periodically revisited and edited so they remain living, meaningful documents.
- **Schoolwide improvement plan (SIP):** This results-focused plan reflects a philosophy of continuous improvement. It contains measurable performance and equity goals that reflect the vision and the mission of the school. All aspects of the plan are continuously informed by data—including data measuring school processes as well as student achievement and attitudinal data—all disaggregated by demographics. Analysis of the data from the SIP occurs on a continuous basis and informs changes in the plan. All individual staff members are responsible for using data to guide their own practice. This data is also used to inform the SIP. The plan is activated through the formation of teacher teams and school-community work groups.
- **Classroom-based improvement plan:** Based on the SIP, each teacher creates a personalized professional development plan for the year.
- **Data analysis:** Staff examine data through a lens of equity to identify any investigate any achievement or opportunity gaps. Staff are trained in and use data analysis techniques that include consideration of such factors as multiple types of data, multiple sources,

comparisons across groups, benchmarking, and longitudinal data. Data analysis occurs on a continuous basis and staff members frequently collaborate to make adjustments in the schoolwide plan as well as classroom practice. Instructional decision making is universally based on the expert use of robust data. Nonstandard analyses are conducted as unique questions arise.

- **Dialogue about meaning:** The school community is engaged in public dialogue about the meaning of the information derived from the data analysis. The dialogue is safe; all staff members have and use the personal skills and professional knowledge to engage in difficult conversations about the meaning of data, especially as it reflects the efficacy of their programs and practices as and the results being obtained with their students. The dialogue builds the alliances necessary to achieve measurable increases in student achievement, deepens staff commitment and capacity to interrupt patterns of inequity and poor student achievement, and provides intellectual and emotional support for building and sustaining an equity-centered learning community.
- **Accountability:** School staff are accountable to one another and to the broader school community. The school exhibits results publicly, preparing a **school portfolio** showing its work for their year and how it relates to schoolwide goals. Parents are active partners in school improvement and related school decisions.
- **Structures that support this work** include common planning time, extended periods for professional development (retreats, in-house professional development, CFGs, and the like), and facilitation inquiry training for staff. In addition, structures are in place to measure the success and impact of the improvement plan. These measurements are public and understood by the entire school community.

**Developing: Practice is reflected in teacher planning and instruction.**

- The school uses frequent student assessment to make some formative and summative judgments.
- Some teachers, grade-level and content-area teams, and administrators collaborate to ensure that curricular, instructional, and assessment practices reflect the intent of the school's vision and mission.
- Meetings occur that assess the impact on student achievement that will result from changing instructional practice, although few measures have been developed to evaluate school processes.
- Most of the data is regularly analyzed by one or two people and turned into useful information that is used to summarize, examine, predict, and prevent. The goal is to use the data to find challenges and inequities in practice and then to use that data to help determine ways of addressing those challenges.
- The examination of data and dialogue about its meaning occur most often in traditional structures such as grade-level or departmental meetings.

**Early: Learning about and planning for the practice has become important to the teaching staff.**

- Some teachers use multiple methods of assessment and performance-based assessments, but these are used only for classroom grades.
- Broad achievement measures are the primary focus of data-gathering, and activities within the school improvement plan focus externally rather than internally. Standard analyses are limited to disaggregation of state and national test results by mandated demographics.
- Few staff members are responsible for data summation and interpretation, and most lack the skills and knowledge to engage in meaningful dialogue about data.

 <p>Coalition of Essential Schools</p>	<h2 style="text-align: center;">Culture of Fairness and Trust</h2>	<h3 style="text-align: center;"><i>CES Common Principles</i></h3> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>▪ <b>Tone of decency and trust</b></li> <li>▪ <b>Commitment to the entire school</b></li> <li>▪ <b>Democracy and equity</b></li> </ul>
<p><b>Culture of fairness and trust</b> includes the explicit activities that are designed to promote and foster a safe, positive, inclusive learning community where students are known well and their social, emotional, and intellectual needs are of primary concern.</p>		
<h3 style="text-align: center;">Benchmark Descriptors</h3>		
<p style="text-align: center;"><b>Transforming: Practices support and honor each student’s social, emotional, and intellectual growth.</b></p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• <b>School core values</b> are the backbone of the community; they are integrated into courses and are manifested, practiced, and contested in several arenas including town meetings, advisories, classes, mediation, and Fairness Committees; students are recognized and acknowledged for their commitments to the school’s core values. <b>Authentic student voice</b> and feedback from students to teachers and administrators are among the school’s values.</li> <li>• The school demonstrates <b>nondiscriminatory and inclusive policies, practices, and pedagogies</b>. It <b>models democratic practices</b> that involve all who are directly affected by the school.</li> <li>• The school actively <b>discovers and cultivates the unique gifts</b>, talents, and passions that every human possesses. Classroom practices are based in <b>student-centered teaching and learning and culturally responsive pedagogy</b>. Students have access to participation in school-sponsored clubs and activities that celebrate and support students of diverse backgrounds, including culture, race and ethnicity, and sexual orientation.</li> <li>• The school has an <b>advisory</b> in that students’ intellectual, emotional, and social needs are honored. In addition, each and every <b>student has an adult advocate</b>.</li> <li>• <b>Family and community voice</b> is also honored and play a role in the guiding of the school.</li> <li>• <b>Discipline is viewed through a community-building lens of the school core values</b> and involves student input and decision making through structures like Fairness Committees. An emphasis is placed on <b>restorative justice</b>, a process that emphasizes repairing the harm caused or correcting revealed violations against democratically agreed-upon school norms. It is best accomplished through cooperative processes that include all stakeholders. Consequently, suspension is almost never used as a penalty, and mechanisms are in place to reintegrate students back into school culture when core values are violated.</li> <li>• <b>Staff reflect the diversity of the student body</b>.</li> <li>• The school facilitates and maintains <b>structures that support the development of trusting relationships and dialogue across difference</b>, such as roles (staff, students, parents) and backgrounds (race, gender, class, sexual orientation, and language</li> </ul>		

and culture).

- The **tone of the school** explicitly and self-consciously stresses values of unanxious expectation, of trust, and of decency. Student-to-student, teacher-to-student, and teacher-to-teacher interactions reflect a tone of decency, mutual respect, and respect for all cultures, socioeconomic status levels, race, gender, sexual orientation, religion, able-ness. The school community is one of interdependence and mutual accountability where students and staff have a sense of **belonging, safety, and nurturance**.
- **The school develops structures that support this work**, including town or community meetings, advisory, Fairness Committees, student governance, student centered, culturally responsive curriculum, and school norms and safety language.

**Developing: Practice is reflected in teacher planning and instruction.**

- Teachers are generalists first and specialists second. Teachers take on multiple roles such as adviser, advocate, peer coach, or facilitator.
- Time is set aside for the school community to reflect on the learning experience and on the impact of understanding on the larger community and society.
- Curricula incorporate cultural and learning diversity whenever possible.
- Teachers have common planning time to work on interdisciplinary units, some of which include social justice.
- Disciplinary decisions involve meetings that include parents, students, and other teachers. Suspension rates and disciplinary actions do not reflect on a particular demographic in the school.

**Early: Learning about and planning for the practice has become important to the teaching staff.**

- Curricula attempt to include at least some cultural and learning diversity. Some teachers include a social justice component.
- Teachers begin to work collaboratively, but the effort is inconsistent.
- Discipline is generally handled by school administrators, sometimes assisted by the student's adviser.
- The teaching staff includes at least a few representatives of most demographic groups found in the student population.

 <p>Coalition of Essential Schools</p>	<p><b>Family Engagement and Community Partnerships</b></p>	<p><b><i>CES Common Principles</i></b></p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>▪ <b>Tone of decency and trust</b></li> <li>▪ <b>Commitment to the entire school</b></li> </ul>
---	--	---

**Family Engagement and Community partnerships** refers to how schools develop and sustain meaningful interactive relationships with their varied communities (that is, parent, education, civic, and business groups), so that all members understand and contribute to the work of supporting children.

**Benchmark Descriptors**

**Transforming: Practices reflect the ability of schools and families and communities to have meaningful relationships with and impact on each other.**

- School builds and sustains a **learning community of stakeholders** (parents and guardians, students, district staff, nonparent community members) who can articulate (that is, define, discuss, revisit, and support) and use habits of mind and heart. The school is accountable to families and other members of the broader school community. The school exhibits results publicly.
- The school has formed **strong partnerships with a variety of community resources** from faith-based organizations, small and large businesses, NGOs and nonprofit organizations, and so on to provide a wide variety of resources and experiences that tap into students’ interests. The school also partners with community agencies (such as clinics, social work organizations, organic farms, after-school programs, and others) to coordinate delivery of social services to youth. **Employer partners** develop rich learning experiences for all students and staff and reap tangible rewards from their relationships with students and the school.
- **Individuals and organizations throughout the community act as design partners** who collaborate on the development of the school vision, curriculum, and programs (such as parent, student, and teacher conferences). Students, parents, families, and community members are involved in substantive decision making both in the classroom and schoolwide. Students, parents, families, and community members have opportunities to develop leadership skills to further contribute to the school community. **Families are active partners** in curriculum design, student learning plans, school improvement, and school decisions. Partners actively work to bring school vision into fruition and receive regular updates on key issues. Family representation in governing bodies is demographically representative of the student body. The authenticity of parent, family, and community member participation is monitored and addressed.
- A **Partnership Board** supports and develops partnerships centered on teaching and learning and ensures that **partnerships are collaborative**, including the sharing of resources and information and the alteration of activities to enhance the capacity of

other partners for mutual benefit.

- **Explicit connections are made between student backgrounds, community needs, and curricular topics.** Parents and family and community members work with the school to identify and make regular use of existing resources (human and material) in the community. Students have a sense of legacy from community members that they are inheriting the world and are expected to make their contribution to it. Student work and projects have a positive impact on their community.
- **Parents are offered opportunities to attain their own B.A. or A.A. degrees,** hereby encouraging their children to be excited about doing the same.
- **Structures that support this work** include the School Site Council, Partnership Board, community meetings, home visits, service learning projects, internships, and a family and community liaison.

**Developing: Practice is reflected in teacher planning and instruction.**

- The school as allocated human resources for supporting a move toward Community Based Social Services.
- Parents and family and community members have access to timely and accurate information about school functions, decisions, and educational opportunities.
- Partnerships are cooperative or involve coordination, in that organizations share resources and information and alter activities for mutual benefit.
- The school provides a room dedicated to parents on the premises so that they can meet, work, and access resources about parenting, child care, tutoring, college, and other things that affect their children.
- The school is open after school hours for community use.
- The school has made use of community resources such as businesses, libraries, parks, and museums to enhance the learning environment.
- The school asks involved parents to make contact with parents who are less involved to solicit their ideas and report back.
- The school provides ongoing and specific information to parents on how to assist students with skills they need to improve.
- The school reduces barriers to parent participation by providing transportation, child care, and flexible schedules, and addresses the needs of English-language learners.
- The school provides written communication in the language of the families.

**Early: Learning about and planning for the practice has become important to the teaching staff.**

- The school provides information about local community organizations.
- Partnerships are for networking, in which organizations share information.
- The school provides information to families on how to monitor and discuss schoolwork at home.
- The school schedules events at different times during the day and evening so that all families can attend some throughout the year.
- The school produces a regular school newsletter with up-to-date information about the school, special events, organizations, meetings, and parenting tips.



## Maximizing Resources for Equitable Outcomes

### *CES Common Principles*

- **Goals apply to all students**
- **Commitment to the entire school**
- **Resources dedicated to teaching and learning**
- **Democracy and equity**

**Maximizing resources for equitable outcomes** refers to the school's use of its central resources—time, money, and staffing—to meet the unique needs of its students. Despite gaps in the funding and resources provided to schools, it is imperative that schools maximize their benefit from the resources they do have. Maximizing resource benefits requires that decisions be made collaboratively by those closest to the learners. *Equitable outcomes* refers to the concept that the school's goals should apply to all students, while the means to these goals will vary as those students themselves vary. All students should be prepared to be ready for both postsecondary and career pathways.

### Benchmark Descriptors

#### **Transforming: Practice is reflected in equitable student outcomes.**

- The school has the autonomy to set its own calendar. The **school schedule and calendar** is designed to allow, meet, and respond to student and faculty needs and maximize learning time for students and planning for staff. The school has the ability to **change the schedule** to meet learning needs, and it has **flexible periods** that include long blocks of instructional time.
- The school has substantial **professional development time opportunities** built into the calendar and at the beginning and end of the school year as well as **common planning time** throughout the day. Other professional development opportunities built into the school year include CFGs, in-house professional development, and retreat days.
- The school creates small groups of students to increase **personalization** so teachers and students know each other well. Students feel intellectually and emotionally supported by members of the school community (staff and students) and teachers know their students' academic strengths and challenges. These structures may include Small Learning Communities, houses, multi-grade classrooms, and looping.
- The school creates **staffing patterns** that reflect students' needs rather than accepting assigned staff levels based on district formulas or adult needs. The school has the ability to hire staff that fit the needs of the school and to excise staff who do not agree with the philosophy of the school, allowing the school to create a unified community.
- Ultimate administrative and budget targets should include **student loads** that promote personalization and a focus on high-quality, relevant instruction. Efforts should be directed toward a goal that no teacher have direct responsibility for more than eighty students in the high school and middle school and no more than twenty in the elementary school.
- The school has **budget autonomy** in order to maximize student learning. Without budget autonomy, a school cannot make the

staffing and scheduling decisions necessary to carry out its mission.

- To best maximize the benefit of resources, decisions are made by those closest to the learner. **Decision making is inclusive and radically democratic.** All school constituencies, including students and parents, are involved in substantive decision making both in the classroom and schoolwide. School decisions are made to support the school's mission.
- The school works with the district to ensure the creation of district-wide policies that allow for the flexible use of resources by individual schools. This includes the **equitable distribution of resources**, such as using a weighted student formula that shares resources to meet the needs of students.

**Developing: Practice is reflected in teacher planning and instruction.**

- Students feel they are known well and supported intellectually and emotionally by at least one adult in the school community.
- Groupings are heterogeneous.
- Students see a limited number of teachers and staff members, so they are known well by that group of adults.
- At least some staff reflect the diversity of the student body.
- The use of teacher professional development for collaboration and common planning is growing.
- The school is developing an understanding of how best to use its control of staffing, schedule, and budget.

**Early: Learning about and planning for the practice has become important to the teaching staff.**

- Some teacher teams are provided with release time, common planning time, or common preps for planning.
- The school still has little or no control of schedule, staffing, and budget.
- While the traditional daily schedule and school calendar is still in place, the school is exploring unique features such as extended time or year-round calendars.
- Some structured attempts at grouping or creating long-term adult contacts may be in place (such as advisory or looping) for some but not all students.



## Professional Learning Community

### ***CES Common Principles***

- **Commitment to the entire school**
- **Resources dedicated to teaching and learning**
- **Democracy and equity**

A **professional learning community** describes a group of administrators and school staff who are united in their commitment to student learning. They share a vision, work and learn collaboratively, visit and review other classrooms, and participate in decision making. The benefits to the staff and students include reduced isolation of teachers, better informed and more committed teachers, and academic gains for students. A professional learning community is a powerful staff-development approach and a potent strategy for school change and improvement. A professional learning community provides professional development opportunities that employ best practices and allow staff to engage as learners as well as leaders, using practices such as Critical Friends Group. It explicitly addresses equity in the classroom and provides collaborative planning time focused on instructional practice.

### **Benchmark Descriptors**

#### **Transforming: Practices support and focus on student learning.**

- **Professional development explicitly addresses equity in the classroom.** Conversations are grounded in data and centered on student learning and understanding how students learn. The school community regularly discusses equity, understanding different points of view, beliefs and assumptions, and actions to be taken. The focus is on improving developing skills and knowledge necessary to improve student performance, eliminate racial gaps, increase emotional well-being for all students, and accelerate learning for students who have been underserved.
- **Professional development is focused on inquiry, collaboration, and reflection,** employing best practices that allow staff to engage as learners as well as leaders. Staff make their practice and beliefs public through the use of structures such as Critical Friends Groups (CFGs), Looking at Student or Teacher Work (LASW or LATW) protocols, professional text, opportunities to critique student presentations and scoring procedures, school-based research, refining rubrics and reviewing performance assessment processes, and peer observation. All of these are in service of staff knowing students well and teaching to a variety of learning styles. Learning is intensely peer-to-peer. School members are **accountable** to one another for their professional development and create portfolios of their best practices to share with other staff.
- **Vision and mission guide the professional development opportunities afforded to the staff.** The 10 Common Principles are referenced and integrated into the professional development. Core values include learning that reflects habits of mind and heart for adults and students, use of data, integration of student voices, and looking at student work and opportunities to develop teacher leadership.

- **Professional development needs are informed through the use of the cycle of continuous school improvement** and through collaborative decision making. Schoolwide and individual teacher professional development plans are aligned with schoolwide improvement plans. The school decides two or three areas of focus that frame professional development for the year.
- The school has substantial **professional development opportunities** built into the calendar at the beginning and end of the school year, extended periods for professional development (retreats, in-house professional development, CFGs, and so on), as well as **common planning time** throughout the day.
- A system is in place to **integrate new staff** into school culture and practices. This includes orientation, training, and continued support (mentoring, support groups, and so on).
- **Structures are present** that facilitate effective collaboration and professional intellectual and emotional conversation. This includes opportunities to attend conferences, CFG training, teacher inquiry groups, and facilitation training for staff. In addition, the school measures the success and impact of professional development. These measurements are public and understood by the entire school community.

**Developing: Practice is reflected in teacher planning and instruction.**

- Professional development includes opportunities for collaboration, reflection, and inquiry. Looking at student and teacher work and learning from each other are key components of professional development.
- Professional development is focused on improving instructional practice. All staff members have a professional development goal focused on instruction and improving student achievement.
- Professional development makes use of a variety of structures and groupings.
- Data is used consistently in faculty meetings. Staff examine the data collaboratively with a focus on understanding the data on student achievement.
- Teachers actively share best practices, although it may be in an unstructured manner.
- Professional development opportunities support knowing students well and understanding various learning styles. Differentiation is a key focus of conversations.
- Use of teacher professional development for collaboration and common planning is growing.

**Early: Learning about and planning for the practice has become important to the teaching staff.**

- Professional development is collaborative in nature.
- A small group of staff members are involved in the planning of the professional development.
- Professional texts are used as resources.
- The 10 Common Principles are present in the professional development plan.
- Some teachers make an independent choice to plan collaboratively.
- There is some understanding of the connection between teacher actions and student learning.
- Professional development may still be episodic or underutilized.



## Transformational Leadership

### *CES Common Principles*

- **A tone of decency and trust**
- **Commitment to the entire school**
- **Resources dedicated to teaching and learning**
- **Democracy and equity**

**Transformational Leadership** refers to the set of attitudes, beliefs, and practices necessary for individuals and school communities to examine the intellectual and social-emotional challenges of educational equity work. This includes the ability to reflect personally and professionally on one's own tacit assumptions and expectations as well as on those built into institutional culture. Leading for equity also requires shared or distributive leadership and decision making from a broad array of constituents—students, teachers, parents, administrators, and other community members so that the people, the vision, and the work of the school are sustained and developed over time.

### Benchmark Descriptors

**Transforming: Practices reflect the ability to support individual growth and challenge inequity in the classroom and schoolwide.**

- School leaders engage in **transformative** leadership, in which they intentionally become critically aware of their own tacit assumptions and expectations and assess their significance and consequence in decision making. Transformative leaders engage in reflective processes that enable self-evaluation of personal values, beliefs, and experiences, and they intentionally promote the conditions and experiences for transformation in their staff. This includes nurturing the voices of others and building their capacity to take leadership in the school community.
- Leaders have developed the ability to **interrupt inequitable practice, to use inquiry as a lens for equity**, to show courage and persistence, to develop social and emotional intelligences among staff and students, to learn from diverse forms of knowledge and experience, and to examine individual and institutional culture as it relates to equity and anti-bias. Because oppression restricts our ability to imagine new possibilities, transformational leaders must hold a proxy vision for what may be that is radically different from what is. Leaders engage the school community in investigations and discussions for personal and professional transformation and openly engage in **inquiries about race, equity, and achievement**.
- Transformational leadership requires that everyone be an instructional leader. **Instructional leaders** focus on standards of practice and performance, pushing to ensure that the daily work of the school is at intellectually high levels. They ask hard questions about culture and practice, foster ongoing opportunities for collaboration, and respond in productive ways to persistent practices and behaviors that raise concerns. They also work to ensure a curriculum that is culturally responsive.
- **Decision making is inclusive and radically democratic**, including structures such as rotating leadership; rotating staff

chairs; student co-directors, and so on. Roles and responsibilities, though shifting, are clear. Staff actually plan the meetings; as teaching materials and specific pedagogies must be placed in the hands of those closest to the learner. All school constituencies, including students and parents, families and community members, have opportunities to gain leadership skills and are involved in substantive decision making both in the classroom and schoolwide. School decisions are made to support the school's mission.

- **Shared vision and mission:** The entire staff represents a collective voice when it comes to creating and maintaining an effective and equitable learning environment. The vision and mission are translated into everyday practice. Formal and frequent opportunities exist for staff to collaborate on success, challenges, and assessment (Link to CSI) results as they put into practice the vision and mission of the school. The vision and mission are periodically revisited and edited so they remain living, meaningful documents.
- Teachers and leaders generate meaningful internal and teacher-led **professional development**, and they also seize external opportunities. **Students have major input** in curriculum and work collaboratively with teachers, and all teachers in the school have an administrative role in addition to their instructional responsibilities so that **leadership is diffuse and transparent**.
- The **School Site Council** reflects all stakeholders, including teachers, parents, community members, and students. Its responsibilities include principal selection, supervision, and removal when necessary (with final approval by the superintendent), budget approval, and setting of the school vision. Parent leadership in school structures reflects the diversity of the school community.
- **Structures are in place to support** these values, such as whole-school decision making, committee structures, leadership teams, CFGs, instructional coaches. Structures are also in place to **build the capacity of members of the school community to develop leadership**, including opportunities for school staff and students to take leadership.

**Developing: Practice is reflected in teacher planning and instruction.**

- School Core Values are explicitly stated and often referred to, but are not always integrated into school curriculum; some structures within the school provide space for understanding and integrating core values.
- Teachers and leaders participate in professional development together. Teachers and leaders decide on curriculum that best serves students and teachers have ownership over course development.
- Students engage in decision making through existing school structures like government, advisory, town meetings, and the like.
- Parents are involved in the PTA or other parent organization. The school has made structure and space available for parent involvement but participations is limited.
- Staff and parents discuss and collaborate to reduce the challenges associated with greater partnerships.
- The school budget is widely shared with all members of the school community.

**Early: Learning about and planning for the practice has become important to the teaching staff.**

- School core values are implicitly known but not explicitly stated in the school. The core values actually infuse few of the structures and processes in use.
- Leaders allow teachers time for professional development but do not engage in it with them. Teachers have some decision-making authority regarding curriculum and school policy, but generally administrators have final say.
- Traditional forms of student government exist in the school. Parents are invited to participate in school events and are welcome into the school at all times. Teachers sometimes engage students through culturally relevant pedagogies and content.