

Nine Characteristics of High Performing Schools

- 1. Clear and Shared Focus.** Everybody knows where they are going and why. The focus is on achieving a shared vision, and all understand their role in achieving the vision. The focus and vision are developed from common beliefs and values, creating a consistent direction for all involved.
- 2. High Standards and Expectations for All Students.** Teachers and staff believe that all students can learn and meet high standards. While recognizing that some students must overcome significant barriers, these obstacles are not seen as insurmountable. Students are offered an ambitious and rigorous course of study.
- 3. Effective School Leadership.** Effective instructional and administrative leadership is required to implement change processes. Effective leaders are proactive and seek help that is needed. They also nurture an instructional program and school culture conducive to learning and professional growth. Effective leaders can have different styles and roles; teachers and other staff, including those in the district office, often have a leadership role.
- 4. High Levels of Collaboration and Communication.** There is strong teamwork among teachers across all grades and with other staff. Everybody is involved and connected to each other, including parents and members of the community, to identify problems and work on solutions.
- 5. Curriculum, Instruction and Assessment Aligned with Standards.** The planned and actual curriculum are aligned with the essential academic learning requirements (EALRs). Research-based teaching strategies and materials are used. Staff understand the role of classroom and state assessments, what the assessments measure, and how student work is evaluated.
- 6. Frequent Monitoring of Learning and Teaching.** A steady cycle of different assessments identifies students who need help. More support and instructional time is provided, either during the school day or outside normal school hours, to students who need more help. Teaching is adjusted based on frequent monitoring of student progress and needs. Assessment results are used to focus and improve instructional programs.
- 7. Focused Professional Development.** A strong emphasis is placed on training staff in areas of most need. Feedback from learning and teaching focuses extensive and ongoing professional development. The support is also aligned with the school or district vision and objectives.
- 8. Supportive Learning Environment.** The school has a safe, civil, healthy and intellectually stimulating learning environment. Students feel respected and connected with the staff and are engaged in learning. Instruction is personalized, and small learning environments increase student contact with teachers.
- 9. High Levels of Family and Community Involvement.** There is a sense that all have a responsibility to educate students, not just the teachers and staff in schools. Families, businesses, social service agencies, and community colleges/universities all play a vital role in this effort.