

Characteristics of Effective Schools

1. A 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 impossible to achieve. 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 nurture an instructional program and school culture conducive to learning and professional growth. Effective leaders have different styles and roles -- teachers and other staff often have a leadership role.

4. High levels of collaboration and communication

There is strong teamwork among all staff across all grades and subject areas. 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 assessments aligned with state standards

The planned and actual curricula are aligned with the essential academic learning requirements. Research-based teaching strategies and materials are used. Staff understands 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 are 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 level of family and community involvement

There is a sense that all have a responsibility to educate students, not just teachers and staff in schools. Families, as well as businesses, social service agencies, and community colleges & universities, all play a vital role in this effort.