

## Enriching Student-Centered Practices in Your School Questions and Strategies for Reflection

### PERSONALIZATION

#### Relationship Building Among Staff and Students

- 1) What structures are in place to encourage meaningful and supportive relationships among students, staff, and administration (e.g., community meetings, advisory, looping, etc.)? How do you know if they are achieving the goals of building relationships?
- 2) How well do you know each child in your classroom (e.g., knowledge of friends, interests, educational and career goals, family structure, special needs, etc.)? How do you assess the quality of your relationships with your students?
- 3) Is there at least one adult on your campus who would defend the right of EACH student to be at your school? Who would say, "This kid has potential and I will fight for them"?
- 4) How do you know if students feel a connection to adults in your school?
- 5) Does the school facilitate student connections to the wider community outside of school?
- 6) What supports and training do you receive on how to build relationships with students and create a safe culture in their classroom?

#### Personalized Instruction

- 7) How do you adapt and adjust curriculum and instruction based on your knowledge of your students?
- 8) How are students' interests reflected in the culture of your classroom?
- 9) How do you help foster students' ability to persist through challenges?

#### School-Wide Structures that Foster Personalization

- 10) How does your school foster continuous relationships between teachers and students through looping or other means?
- 11) How do you use your knowledge of your students to inform how you interact with them?
- 12) In what ways do you celebrate students (as whole people, not just for their academic success) in your school and classroom?
- 13) How do you know if students feel connected to school? How do you help those who do not feel connected build that attachment?
- 14) What kinds of decisions do students get to make or contribute to at your school and in your classroom? Are these decisions just about their own experience (e.g., how they will present their learning) or will these decisions impact other students (e.g., a new grading policy)?

- 15) On what topics and under what circumstances do adult educators solicit the opinions of their students? How institutionalized is this practice?

### **Connections to Parents**

- 16) How do you build and maintain trust with parents? How do you assess it?
- 17) What opportunities do parents have to contribute to decision making in your school? What kinds of decisions do they get to make?
- 18) How do you include parents in their children's learning process?
- 19) How are parents celebrated?
- 20) How do you convey to parents how much they are valued?

## **CURRICULUM**

### **Rigor**

- 1) How do you assess whether your curriculum is rigorous enough so that students are challenged but not shutting down from frustration (zone of proximal development)?
- 2) Are all students provided with access to the courses they need to attend a 4-year college?
- 3) How are students supported to be successful in the college prep coursework?
- 4) Is the content challenging across learning modalities?

### **Teacher Freedom to Develop, Design, and Choose Curriculum**

- 5) How does your curriculum connect to your school's vision and values?
- 6) What dictates the curriculum choices in your classroom?
- 7) Do you work with other teachers to design interdisciplinary and cross-curricular units? How does interdisciplinary or cross-curricular instruction enable you to support deeper learning?

### **Student Input**

- 8) How are educators assessing students' prior knowledge and skill strengths to help facilitate students' connection with new material and skill development?
- 9) How do you engage students in determining what is taught?
- 10) How does your curriculum build on what students already know and push students to deepen and add complexity to their understanding?
- 11) How does the curriculum build on students' lives, communities, and interests?
- 12) What freedom do students have in exploring new topics and ideas based on their interests? How do you engage the community (resources, input, and expertise) within the school?
- 13) How are the student population and its neighboring community (diversity, culture, language) reflected in the school?

### **School-Wide Structures to Facilitate Relevant and Rigorous Curriculum**

- 14) As a staff, how have you articulated how students' knowledge and skills build from year to year to create a profile of what a graduate from your school should know and be able to do?
- 15) As a staff, how have you articulated the expectations for what students should know and be able to do for each grade level and content area?

- 16) School-wide, how do you, as a staff, ensure that all students are held to the highest expectations?

## **PEDAGOGY**

### **Pedagogical Approach**

- 1) What strategies do you use to facilitate rather than direct student learning?
- 2) How do you support students in learning how to direct their own learning?
- 3) What are the range of strategies you use with your students to reinforce and deepen their learning?
- 4) How true is this statement about your approach to pedagogy: “If students don’t learn the way you teach, then teach the way students learn”?
- 5) Are students doing the heavy lifting in the classroom, or is class time predominantly teacher-directed?

### **Opportunities for Student Collaboration**

- 6) What strategies do you use to facilitate peer-to-peer learning?
- 7) How are you facilitating the development of students’ collaboration skills? How do you structure group learning opportunities so that students have clear roles and are all mutually accountable?
- 8) What percentage of time do students have the opportunity to discuss, talk, interact with one another, and/or engage in dialogue? To what extent is this student talk a driver of learning?

### **Student Voice**

- 9) What kinds of opportunities do students have to defend their learning?
- 10) How do teachers monitor students’ intrinsic drive? Do students attribute their success to intrinsic or extrinsic factors?
- 11) How do students evaluate their own work? What kind of learning does that produce?
- 12) In what ways are students asked to develop their oral communication and public presentation skills?

### **Demonstration of Learning**

- 13) How do you provide students with multiple ways to demonstrate their learning? How often do you employ this strategy?
- 14) How do you structure instruction in ways that convey there is not one correct answer?
- 15) In what ways does your classroom encourage risk-taking and embracing mistakes?
- 16) How is learning structured so that students are asked to solve authentic, real-world problems?
- 17) How is learning structured so that students are asked to apply a concept in a new context?
- 18) In what ways do you structure your instruction so that students are responsible for producing and demonstrating their knowledge versus regurgitating information or repeating what the teacher has said?

### **School-Wide Instructional Philosophy**

- 19) What kinds of practices does your school have in place that ensures that students are held to common expectations from class to class?
- 20) Is there adequate time for deep inquiry and investigation, group learning, presentation and defense of learning, and off-campus learning? If not, how could such time be created?

## **ASSESSMENTS**

### **Types of Assessment and Criteria**

- 1) Do you have a well-articulated graduate profile of what students should know and be able to do by the time they graduate? How are assessments (within and across content areas) aligned to this graduate profile?
- 2) What are the multiple ways that students can demonstrate and defend their learning? How are assessments authentic measures of what students know and can do?
- 3) Are formative assessments a frequent component of your instruction? How does it inform how you teach?
- 4) How do formative assessments work to ensure students are successful during larger summative assessments?
- 5) Do grading structures fairly represent students' process as well as their end product work?
- 6) How do you think about which assignments/projects/tasks need a major performance-based assessment?
- 7) How are assessments structured to capture the essential knowledge and skills students need for a given project or activity?
- 8) How might you include authentic audiences into assessments?

### **Collaboration**

- 9) How do teachers collaborate in the design and implementation of culminating tasks for performance-based assessments?
- 10) How do you ensure that criteria and rubrics for assessment are consistent across grade levels and departments?

### **Reflection and Revision**

- 11) How often do you explicitly ask students to reflect on their learning process and/or offer feedback to you about the style of instruction?
- 12) What kinds of opportunities do students have to revise and redo their work?
- 13) Do students have opportunities to demonstrate their learning in an alternative way if they cannot successfully demonstrate it in the prescribed way?

### **Student Expectations**

- 14) How are students made aware of the criteria on which they are assessed?
- 15) To what extent do students help develop the criteria?

### **Grades, Assessments, and Learning**

- 16) Under what circumstances are performance-based assessments high-stakes for students?

- 17) How does your grade book reinforce an emphasis on mastery rather than an accumulation of points?
- 18) Can students pass a class if they demonstrated they learned the material but did not complete all the classwork? Why or why not?
- 19) Can students pass the class if they did all the required work but failed to demonstrate they understood the material? Why or why not?

## **INSTRUCTIONAL SUPPORTS**

### **In-Class Supports**

- 1) When students don't understand what's happening in class, what strategies do you employ to ensure that they can get on track?
- 2) What in-class strategies do you use to differentiate instruction for students who need more of a challenge and for those who need additional scaffolding?
- 3) How might you engage high-achieving students in supporting their peers (during class or outside of class)?
- 4) How are low-achieving students valued and active contributors to a positive growth-mindset learning culture?

### **Scaffolds and Expectations**

- 5) How are learning goals and expectations made clear to students in your class? How do you know students understand what is expected of them?
- 6) How do you structure your instruction to scaffold student learning for students who enter the classroom with vastly different knowledge and skill levels?
- 7) How do you provide opportunities for struggling students to get sufficient opportunities to practice and demonstrate their learning, while those who are excelling can extend and apply their learning in novel contexts?

### **School-Wide Supports**

- 8) What resources does your school have to support students when it seems you're at a loss for what to do next?
- 9) How are students' social, emotional, physical, and mental health needs addressed in your school?
- 10) What systems do you have in place in your school to monitor and support student progress?
- 11) How do your school's student supports ensure that all students can meet high expectations?
- 12) How do your student supports help students set short- and long-term goals?
- 13) How do your student supports help students stay on track to graduate and prepare for college and career?
- 14) How are students supported in the transition to high school? And the transition to college or career post-high school?
- 15) How are special education students and students with learning challenges supported within the classroom and by the school?
- 16) How do your school and teachers ensure that English language learners are receiving the supports they need to have equal opportunity to graduate and attend college as their native English-speaking peers?

### **Outside-of-Class Supports**

- 17) How available are you to your students outside of class time (for tutoring, conferencing, guided practice, etc.)?
- 18) How do you engage parents and community organizations to ensure that students have appropriate academic and social support?

## **CONNECTION TO COLLEGE & CAREER**

### **Relevance and Application of Knowledge**

- 1) How do you help students make real-world connections between what they learn in class and their lives outside of school?
- 2) How do students engage in inquiry-based tasks and projects such that they can use 21st century skills to integrate and apply knowledge?

### **Connection to College**

- 3) How does college preparation factor into the culture of the school? Of your classroom?
- 4) Since college success is largely dependent on intrinsic drive, how well does the school climate empower students to develop their own learning objectives and learning process?
- 5) Do all students graduate having completed college entrance requirements?
- 6) How does the college counselor (or advisor) work with students to develop a post-high school plan? How is this plan communicated with teachers and other support providers?
- 7) What supports do students have in applying to college, for financial aid, and scholarships?
- 8) What opportunities do students have to explore college options during the school year?
- 9) How do you know how your students do once they are in college? Do you adjust how your school prepares students for college based on feedback from alumni?

### **Connection to Career**

- 10) What opportunities do students have to explore career options during the school year?
- 11) Do all students engage in internships and community service?
- 12) How does your school link career experiences and skills with traditional academic courses?
- 13) What kinds of skills best prepare students for careers? How are those skills integrated in your instruction?
- 14) What kinds of out-of-school work-based experiences do students have? How are these structured to maximize student learning? How do you assess the effectiveness of these experiences? Do all students have access to these experiences?
- 15) If you have a career theme, how is it integrated across the curriculum in all courses?

## TEACHER COLLABORATION & PROFESSIONAL DEVELOPMENT

### Collaborative Planning Time

- 1) How often does vertical and horizontal planning occur? Is it sufficient?
- 2) Do you get an opportunity to collaborate with teachers who share the same students?
- 3) How much time is embedded in the school day/week for you to collaborate with other teachers?
- 4) How clear are the expectations for how you and your colleagues use collaboration time? Who creates the expectations?
- 5) To what extent does collaboration time focus on student learning and/or teacher reflection on practice?
- 6) How is a focus on student learning grounded in data?
- 7) How often do you examine student work in teacher collaboration?
- 8) How often do you observe other teachers' instruction? How often do other teachers observe your instruction?
- 9) Does collaboration lead to changes in your instructional practice? How do you know?
- 10) Does collaboration increase your use of student-centered instructional practices?

### Professional Development

- 11) Is professional development designed in response to existing needs of the school community?
- 12) Do you collaborate with other teachers and administrators on how and what to bring to the staff for professional development?
- 13) How is the topic for professional development determined? What role do you have in identifying your own professional learning needs and identifying useful professional learning experiences?
- 14) To what extent are professional learning experiences connected to the school's mission and yearlong goals?
- 15) How are collaboration and professional learning opportunities structured to foster teacher engagement and buy-in?
- 16) How do school leaders ensure that topics of professional learning lead to changes in teacher practice?

### Cooperative and Reflective Workplace Culture

- 17) Are teachers in your school open to sharing with each other and learning from each other's successes and failures?
- 18) How is a safe culture for educator risk-taking and transparency fostered in your school?
- 19) How is a culture of self-reflection fostered? To what extent is that culture modeled by school leaders?

## DISTRUBUTED & SHARED LEADERSHIP

### Questions to reflect on:

- 1) How do you ensure that decisions are aligned to the mission of the school and to student rather than adult needs?
- 2) How are decisions made at your school? Is a consensus model used? What happens when there is no consensus? How transparent is the process?
- 3) What decision-making structures are in place in your school? How representative are the teachers participating in these decision-making structures (across grade levels, departments, gender, ethnicity, years of experience)?
- 4) Are systems in place for all educators to be represented by someone in the position of leadership?
- 5) How is decision making kept close to the classroom?
- 6) What kinds of issues do teachers get to make decisions about? Do administrators honor teachers' decisions even if they disagree with them?
- 7) What kinds of decisions do students, parents, and community members provide input on? How do you ensure that they are representative of your school community?
- 8) Does leadership consider the input of teachers, parents, and students when implementing a school policy?
- 9) How do the school leaders respond to needs of the students and staff?

## Strategies for Using the Student-Centered Educator's Tool

Ideally, the educator's tool will be used by a small group of educators in a collaborative setting, where they can discuss and build upon the ideas. Student-centered practice thrives in a setting where teachers view each other as resources and are willing to reflect honestly on their practice in order to create rich learning environments for students.

The following activities could be used as standalone activities or as a sequence of activities to support your self-reflection, collaboration, and growth. All the activities are designed to engage teachers and administrators in a collaborative process rather than as top-down directives.

1. Look for evidence:
  - a. Use this tool to create a walk-through observation guide that identifies evidence of student-centered practices.
  - b. Conduct non-evaluative peer-to-peer observations of practice.
  - c. Create a process to engage in systematic assessment of the observations of student-centered practice and to celebrate successes and supports to address gaps.
2. Expand your base—include students in the ongoing pursuit of student-centered learning:
  - a. Use the questions with a representative student advisory panel.
  - b. Adapt the questions to conduct student, parent, and community surveys to actively question assumptions of connection.
  - c. Share the results with staff to form ongoing refinements to meet the needs of all students and stakeholders.
3. Narrow the focus:
  - a. Use this tool to conduct a needs assessment of your own school's student-centered practices.
  - b. Identify a focus student-centered practice as an area for growth.
  - c. Develop a professional development plan to address that focus area.
4. Identify best practice:
  - a. Identify a student-centered feature for study and school growth.
  - b. Conduct a walk-through of classrooms to identify teachers who are strong in that practice.
  - c. Videotape teachers or have them share their strong practice with staff.
  - d. Create a forum to discuss the best practices and offer staff support in their implementation.
5. Rethink teacher evaluation:
  - a. Use this tool to revise your school's teacher evaluation process.
  - b. Solicit teacher and student input in this process.
6. Dig deep:
  - a. Select one question from this tool that resonates with your school, staff, or you personally.

- b. Identify the multiple assumptions and questions embedded within it to think deeply about the ideas and tensions inherent in that particular student-centered practice.
- 7. Engage in action research, inquiry, or professional learning community discussions:
  - a. Use the questions in this tool as a starting point to develop inquiry questions for investigation.
  - b. Develop a process through action research, professional learning communities, or other processes to interrogate your inquiry question and share the findings.