

Instructional Focus: A Beacon in the Confusion of Change

Why Develop an Instructional Focus?

As we start the 2013-2014 school year, it is easy to feel overwhelmed among the vast and varied change that is bearing down on us. Never before have we experienced a drastically shifting curriculum alongside the implementation of a radically different teacher and principal evaluation system. These two initiatives are complex, multi-faceted, and require great preparation in order to implement smoothly. It is easy to become “bogged down” by the minutia of these huge transformations and lose sight of our instructional vision for our school.

We at CFN 107 believe that the key to success this year is to develop and follow through with a high-leverage Instructional Focus; this Instructional Focus will act as a beacon to organize your school’s actions around various DOE initiatives and the true work of increasing student achievement. We ask that you take a minute to read about our thinking behind an Instructional Focus. We really believe, when thought about carefully, it can become the through line that helps unite your school.

What is an Instructional Focus?

From the 2013-2014 Citywide Instructional Expectations

The citywide instructional expectations ask schools to identify an instructional focus as part of their preparation for the 2013–14 school year. It is important for schools to use their goal-setting process as an opportunity to prioritize improving classroom practice across the school. While the goal-setting process will remain in the Quality Review Rubric for 2013–14, the term “instructional focus” will not be added, as this is a practice that supports goal-setting rather than an additional aspect of accountability.

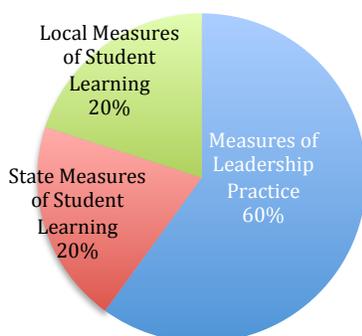
The DOE offers this guidance on identifying an instructional focus based on a belief that a focus creates coherence among multiple initiatives, clearly frames the work teachers and school leaders will prioritize to narrow the gap between what the standards describe and what students currently know and are able to do, and allows for strategic use of resources. The focus is one high-leverage instructional priority that is aligned with a school’s vision and its “coherent set of beliefs about how students learn best.”(Quality Review Indicator 1.2)

Characteristics of a strong instructional focus:

- It directly impacts classroom practice.
- It is evident across classrooms, in teacher feedback, and in the school’s year-long professional development plan.
- It is developed collaboratively based on multiple types of data and rooted in the needs of the school.
- It is worthy of study and can be assessed repeatedly over time.
- It allows for multiple teaching strategies that are supported through professional development.

How an Instructional Focus Affects You: Measures of Leadership Practice

It is important to remember that your Annual Principal Performance Review (A/PPR) is based on the following three components:



Local Measures: based on key Progress Report metrics

Middle Schools:

- ELA/Math average proficiency
- ELA/Math median growth percentile—all students
- ELA/Math median growth percentile—students in the lowest third

High Schools and Transfer Schools

- 4 and 6 year graduation rate (as of June)
- % of students earning 10+ credits

State Measures of Student Learning

Middle Schools:

- SED-provided growth or value-added scores on ELA and Math scores

High Schools and Transfer Schools

- SED-provided growth percentile on ELA and Integrated Algebra Regents
- SED-provided comparative growth in Regents Exams passed

60% of your annual evaluation score is based on a minimum of two supervisory visits using the Quality Review rubric. Superintendents and Quality Reviewers will be extremely interested in learning about your instructional focus and seeing how your schools has made progress towards it. While the term “Instructional Focus” in not explicit in the Quality Review rubric, it is alluded to in all but one of the double weighted indicators:

1.1 Design engaging, rigorous, and coherent curricula, including the arts, physical and health education, for a variety of learners and aligned to key State standards.

1.2 Develop teacher pedagogy from a coherent set of beliefs about how students learn best [this is your Instructional Focus] that is informed by a research-based, common teaching framework and is aligned to curricula, engaging and meets the needs of all learners so that all students produce meaningful work products.

1.3 Make strategic organizational decisions to support the school’s instructional goals [your school’s Instructional Focus] and meet student learning needs as evidenced by meaningful student work products.

2.2 Align assessments to curricula, use on-going assessment and grading practices, and analyze information on student learning outcomes to adjust instructional decisions at the team and classroom levels [around your Instructional Focus].

4.1 Use the observation of classroom teaching with a research-based, common teaching framework and the analysis of learning outcomes [around your Instructional Focus] to elevate school-wide instructional practices and implement strategies that promote professional growth and reflection, with a special focus on new teachers.

How CFN 107 envisions an Instructional Focus can support you and your school:

