How to Evaluate Your Capacity for a Systemic Culture
by Rhonda Renfro

Districts are challenged more and more to develop or maintain a systemic culture for curriculum, instruction, and assessment. Very often, the first challenge is in determining the extent to which a systemic culture exists and in this E-Hint, our goal is to give you the questions and some tools to figure out where your district is and what steps might help move you closer to solving the challenges of establishing a systemic culture.

While not a comprehensive list by any means, we present this list of questions to initiate and open a dialogue regarding district-wide academic processes among stakeholders within a district. These challenging questions, posed from a first-person perspective, could help an administrative team affirm or evaluate their current curriculum structures and processes.

1. Do we have an academic structure in place to ensure that our curriculum processes are district-based rather than site-based?
2. Do we have a model or system of processes we follow, as a district, for alignment of curriculum, instruction, and assessment?
3. Does our current model or system of processes have a built-in reporting method so that documentation is readily available for accreditation visits or mandated reports (ESSA,

State Accreditation Models, etc.) without having to spend an extra amount of time and expense to prepare such evidence?

4. Have we, as a district, studied change theory sufficiently to support first- and second-order changes within the district?

5. Do we need outside help to establish a systemic, shared decision-making culture for these issues?

6. Do we have a district-wide, board-approved policy for how curriculum, instruction, assessment, and student learning decisions are made to ensure stability when there are administrative staff changes?

7. Do we have a structured timeline (long-range plan) to indicate the cycle of curriculum development, resource adoption, and the writing of local assessments for every subject area?

8. Do we have a district-wide, representative body of stakeholders (various levels of administration, teachers, specialists, board members, community members) that meets regularly rather than leaving the responsibility to a single person to address such things as:
   - Acceptable grading practices
   - Assessment use (security and administration)
   - Accountability requirements to assure implementation of the district curriculum
   - Instructional alignment to the curriculum
   - Definitions of mastery
   - Use of data from assessments

9. What roles do the building principal or other administrators play as instructional leaders in their buildings as well as within the district?

10. Do we have consistency in what is taught and what is expected of students within the same grade level or course regardless of the teacher, building, or year?

11. How are new staff members prepared to follow the model/procedures before they begin teaching in our district?

12. How does the district ensure that the required use of the curriculum is put into practice with fidelity?

13. Do we have valid, local assessments to use as data for timely intervention for students who are struggling?

14. Do we have a method or practice to examine student learning data to improve our instructional strategies, our assessment techniques, or our expectations for students?

Although not exhaustive, these are some examples of questions that the Curriculum Leadership Institute Model for School Improvement provides support in answering. Click here for a rubric to determine where your district's current strengths and weaknesses are in addressing these critical issues.