Key Elements of Instructional Excellence for Multi-Classroom Leaders:

Monitor Learning

Assess students' learning achievement and growth with data—daily and weekly—from the start and continuing through the year.

"**D**ata is everything. If you don't look at your data, then you don't know your students at all."—*Multi-Classroom Leader Stephanie Roper*

"**W**e've gone from thinking about a six-week cycle to thinking…'the exit ticket is too late.' We need to adjust instruction during the class."—*Multi-Classroom Leader Ellen Rayburn*

When teachers use student learning data to adjust instruction, students see that teachers know where they stand every day, care about their progress, and are changing their instruction to fit each student's needs.

Monitoring learning to assess achievement and growth with data before and throughout the year includes the following:

∗ **Use aligned assessments**
   o Align with lesson, unit, and annual goals
   o Incorporate standards-based grading
   o Capture data on both mastery and growth

∗ **Track with an effective and efficient system**
   o Follow assessment calendar; adjust if needed
   o Standardize and automate some components

∗ **Collect and compare multiple data points**
   o Conduct pre-tests for baseline data
   o Assess student grasp daily
   o Use interim assessments (unit, quarter)
   o Observe student activity
   o Confer with students and families informally
   o Use surveys for formal student feedback

∗ **Generate reports to summarize mastery and growth and to guide instructional change**

∗ **Analyze data for individuals' needs, trends, and outliers in each class and across school**

Great teachers look to multiple sources to assess, as frequently and constantly as possible, how each student is progressing so they can quickly adjust their instructional content and methods. They take the time to create assessments that they find rigorous and adequately aligned with their goals and the standards. They may not always have options in what tracking systems to use, but they find and tweak systems that work for them and the teams they lead to lighten the load of gathering and analyzing so much data on their students' progress.

Teachers whose students make high growth collect data for analysis during class, between classes, and weekly for a more in-depth look, alone and with their teaching team. They collect data through, among other things: **online learning systems; aggressive monitoring; "do now" activities; exit tickets; multiple interim assessments plus summative assessments** (all carefully aligned to the state standards for that subject); and **other measures such as attendance and student feedback**.

Using an **online platform** that grades assessments and matches them to mastery levels, teachers are able to know immediately where students stand, says Multi-Classroom Leader (MCL) Erin Burns, who leads a biology teaching team. Being able to make quick adjustments for the whole class or one student helps ensure that student misunderstandings or knowledge gaps do not persist.

That quick response is key, great teachers emphasize.

MCLs Ellen Rayburn and Bobby Miles say the move at their school to "**aggressive monitoring**" enables a much faster response to student learning issues.

In each class period, students start by completing a **"do now"** exercise (a brief activity posted on the board for students to do as soon as they arrive), which the teacher quickly reviews and uses to adjust that day's planned instruction accordingly. As students work independently, teachers using aggressive monitoring are walking around checking each student's work, watching for predicted areas of specific concern or new issues, and making quick adjustments, such as pulling students into a small group for immediate help or re-teaching an element to the whole class.

"A lot of teachers do monitor—they walk around just to make sure that kids are on task—but now they're walking around with a purpose, so now they know exactly what it is they're looking for so they can address that misconception in the moment," Miles said.

Then, **exit tickets** (a question or fill-in-the-blank that students complete just before leaving) confirm that students understood the instruction by the end of class, or show teachers any remaining issues to clear up in the next class.

Such monitoring also enables more personalization for students. For example, the "do now" may be a diagnostic exercise to tell teachers how much students already know, and if some students have already mastered a concept, they can receive advanced assignments for the day while their classmates work toward mastery.

Other teachers also cite the use of data to enable personalization through rapid changes in small-group instruction, creating very **flexible groups** to respond to student needs. "The data is what drives our flex groups, and then within there, [drives] our instruction because even though our kids are flexibly grouped, you still have a range within that group of students."—*MCL Frank Zaremba*

Schools that incorporate **online learning systems** may find it easier to personalize instruction, because the systems provide a wealth of data daily, showing student speed, mastery, and stumbling blocks. These systems may be fairly simple—a way to create online assessments and receive a computer-generated report on each student's responses—or more elaborate, providing students with individualized "playlists" to follow through a class period, moving at their own pace while the system generates a steady stream of data on how each student responded to each piece of each assignment, which teachers can monitor in real time.

But schools don't need high-tech systems to use data well. Those daily exit tickets, for example, can be a powerful tool to give teachers daily feedback.

MCL Hadley Moore sees exit tickets as a key means for her teaching team to track student progress and mastery, so **teachers can identify what they need to review, re-teach, or repackage and reintroduce**.

"As a result [of using exit slips], we always, always have something to talk about in terms of data, and by prioritizing it at the beginning of the meeting it ensures that it doesn't get pushed to the end, that it doesn't get

forgotten because again, that is very valuable information that's taking the temperature of the class and seeing how things are going," Moore said. "I also ensure that when I write the unit plans, I leave Fridays pretty flexible. Fridays are our day for assessments…but that also leaves a significant amount of time to review and to reteach if necessary, and so by building that time in, it allows teachers to really focus what they need to do and to differentiate for their particular classes."

A less-used but powerful data source can be **student surveys**. Short surveys can help teachers understand what types of instruction and activities during a lesson or unit their students responded to best, and understand how students interpret what's happening the classroom. For example, one principal noted times when a teacher may have thought she provided a simple redirection for a student, only to learn through a survey how hard the student took it emotionally, affecting her class performance.

Using data in all these ways can improve any teacher's instruction, but **great teachers see the power of data especially when used with a teaching team**. Frequent meetings to analyze data together allow teachers to catch any issues they might overlook on their own. Teaching team leaders often spearhead this, generating reports that their teams can review together, and guiding new teachers to handle and synthesize a wealth of data sources.

In **data meetings**, "we get down to the granular level of looking at exactly what the students wrote and exactly what misconceptions that reveals in their thinking. And so, at that point, we take the lessons that we have already practiced and we modify them again for what the students are showing us on their assessment or on their exit ticket data or whatever the assessment that we're looking at that week is, and we make further adjustments based on what the students need. A lot of times that includes breaking the students into groups based on their misconception. … We also sometimes will do a full-class review just depending on what the trends look like in the data—if it's a few or if it's a lot of students."—*MCL Ellen Rayburn*

"We use our data meetings to analyze data that pertains to attendance, that pertains to behavior, and that pertains to academic achievement. So during a data meeting [on] instructional practice, we will look at student scores on whatever we chose to use for the baseline assessment, and from there we fill out what's

called a **note catcher** [with] observations and different trends and patterns that we might have noticed in the data. And then, based on that, we create a formal action plan and reteaching plan for what our next steps are."—*MCL Kathryn Smith*

"There's a lot of people working together, so if we see something that's not working for kids, we need to have that discussion together—because a special education teacher might see, 'Hey, my kids are really struggling with this part of the curriculum,' and we need to have a conversation together to say, 'OK, what supports can we put into place?' So that's why meeting daily is crucial, because those things might come up today and we're moving on to a new topic in two days, so kids will start to fall behind if we don't address that."—*MCL Russ Stanton*

Note: Some quotes have been edited for clarity and length. Quotes come from interviews conducted with Opportunity Culture educators over several years; titles for each educator here reflect the role the educator was in at the time of the interview.

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Learn More: Watch the *Monitor Learning* videos.

Discussion Questions

1. Which actions in this element of instructional excellence are **strengths** for you or your team?

2. Which actions in this element of instructional excellence are **weaknesses** for you or your team? Think about actions you never take, fail to take as often as needed, or do not take as well as needed to achieve strong learning growth consistently.

3. What one to three specific changes will you or your team make to **use your strengths more** often or more consistently and **improve weaknesses** in the coming months?

4. Make a brief **action plan** with specific goals, roles, and time by which you will make specific changes!

5. Did your changes produce **better learning results?** If so, keep them. If not, think again about what other changes to make!

For more elements of instructional leadership and excellence, visit the *Instructional Leadership and Excellence* **webpages**, which each have **video clips** of teacher-leaders who have achieved high-growth student learning; **discussion questions** for developing your team and yourself; **training links** for ongoing professional development; and other **developmental resources** including books, videos, articles, and tools

For more on an Opportunity Culture, visit **OpportunityCulture.org**.

We're happy to hear your feedback on this element; **contact us!**

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