



# Making Schools Work

## Key Practices for the Elementary Grades

SREB's **Making Schools Work school improvement process** is grounded in research showing that increasing student achievement begins with increasing student effort. Five focus areas guide the process: *leadership for continuous improvement, aligned curriculum, engaging instruction, career exploration* and *systems of support*. Making Schools Work engages the entire school community — teachers, leaders and staff working together in a distributed leadership structure — in addressing these focus areas and taking ownership of their improvement efforts.

Schools use 10 key school and classroom practices to guide improvement. The process often begins with SREB's [Curriculum and Instruction Review](#), in which an external team of teachers, leaders and local partners assess promising practices and problems of practice in the school and recommend actions to eliminate those problems. Later, SREB's [Site Development Workshop](#) engages faculty focus teams in analyzing CIR findings, conducting research, setting bold goals for student achievement and developing plans for improvement. SREB offers [school improvement coaching](#) and [professional learning](#) to support these plans.

By combining this process with the **10 Key Practices** below, elementary schools build their capacity to continuously address problems and meet clear targets for student success.

- 1. Culture of Learning** — Create a culture that inspires learning and promotes excellence for each student, teacher and member of the school community. (**Leadership for Continuous Improvement**)

### Indicators

- A. The entire school community establishes a culture of high expectations in which students develop a growth mindset and cultivate the ability to think critically and creatively, solve problems, communicate effectively and collaborate with others.
- B. Teachers establish an environment in which classroom routines, procedures and shared norms support a learning culture that is inclusive, respectful and fair.

- C. Teachers engage in professional learning on research-based instructional tools and strategies, seek feedback and take responsibility for their students' growth.
- D. School leaders and teachers create opportunities to showcase student excellence for parents and the entire school community.

**2. Aligned Curriculum** — Design and deliver instruction in which both the content being taught and the instructional choices teachers make help students understand the full intent of the standards. (*Aligned Curriculum*)

*Indicators*

- A. School leaders and teachers use established processes, rubrics and protocols to ensure alignment of instruction, assignments and assessments with state standards.
- B. Teacher teams use established processes to review, analyze and select rigorous, student-centered instructional tools that align with standards.
- C. Teachers unpack and align state standards with relevant, engaging instruction and assignments.
- D. School leaders create a data-driven environment in which teachers receive the tools, resources and support they need to use student data to inform and adapt their instruction.
- E. School leaders work with teachers both individually and in groups to use data to align their instruction with standards and evaluate the impact of instructional strategies on student engagement and achievement.

**3. Integrated Literacy** — Design and deliver instruction that promotes the development of literacy skills by integrating literacy standards in all content areas. (*Aligned Curriculum*)

*Indicators*

- A. The entire school community prioritizes the achievement of schoolwide literacy goals by planning and providing strong Tier I programs and instructional strategies that support students as they transition from *learning to read* to *reading to learn*.
- B. The entire school community uses a data-based process to track student literacy development and determine how to provide targeted supports.
- C. Students are exposed to a variety of high-quality, grade-appropriate texts that engage them in challenging learning experiences.
- D. Teachers provide regular opportunities for students to be active learners by engaging in reading, writing, speaking and listening in all content areas.
- E. Teachers provide opportunities for students to discuss texts and develop an academic vocabulary that supports meaningful discourse.
- F. Teachers provide students with daily opportunities to connect reading, writing and critical thinking.
- G. Teachers provide students with daily opportunities to independently practice skills and strategies in authentic, real-world contexts.

**4. Engaging Instruction** — Design and provide robust, standards-driven instruction that challenges students to complete high-quality assignments across the curriculum. (*Engaging Instruction*)

*Indicators*

- A. The entire school community prioritizes the achievement of schoolwide numeracy goals by planning and providing strong Tier I math programs and instructional strategies that use a balanced, Concrete-Representational-Abstract approach to promote student collaboration, inquiry and real-world problem-solving.
- B. Teachers use powerful instructional practices for [literacy](#), [mathematics](#), [science](#) and other curricular areas to engage students in authentic learning.
- C. Teachers plan and provide authentic STEM instruction using integrated, [project- and problem-based learning strategies](#) that help students master math, science and technology standards.
- D. School leaders and teachers use relevant, grade-level instructional strategies to promote resiliency, grit and a growth mindset for each student.
- E. Teachers create real-world lessons and activities that align with social studies and civics standards and empower students to become good citizens.
- F. Teachers design structured opportunities for student teams to collaborate, engage in peer questioning and feedback, and solve real-world problems in varied instructional settings.

- 5. Instructional Collaboration** — Provide the time, structures and supports for teachers to collaboratively plan instruction, assignments and assessments that address the unique needs of each student. (**Engaging Instruction**)

**Indicators**

- A. School leaders use structured protocols to establish a culture of authentic, meaningful collaboration in which teachers regularly work together to plan instruction, assignments and assessments.
- B. Teachers engage in co-teaching, observing and coaching with their peers.
- C. School leaders make time for teachers to meet in professional learning teams in which they use student work and assessment data to reflect on prior instruction and make decisions about future instruction.
- D. School leaders create opportunities for teachers to celebrate their students' successes with the entire school community.
- E. Teachers, instructional coaches and other staff use protocols and procedures to analyze student work and assess the effectiveness of instructional strategies on student engagement and achievement.

- 6. Career Awareness** — Provide each student with authentic learning experiences that tap into children's natural curiosity and spark awareness of their community, country and world. (**Career Pathways**)

**Indicators**

- A. Teachers develop students' awareness of how their interests, talents and aspirations play a role in their decision-making and interpersonal relationships.
- B. Students explore the difference between jobs, occupations and careers and explore a wide range of local, regional, national and global career options and learning opportunities.
- C. Teachers provide career exploration activities centered on students' interests, talents and aspirations.
- D. School leaders and teachers identify the systems and behaviors through which school, family, community and culture may influence students' career aspirations.
- E. Teachers develop activities that help students become responsible citizens.
- F. School leaders equip teachers with the academic and career information they need to help students discover and explore their career interests.

- 7. Parents and Communities** — Establish meaningful opportunities for parents and community partners to support teaching and learning at the school. (**Systems of Support**)

**Indicators**

- A. The entire school community promotes positive relationships among students, families and staff.
- B. School leaders gain the trust and confidence of students, families and the school community by promoting a positive mindset and a shared commitment to student engagement and achievement.
- C. The entire school community helps connect students and families with local services and supports.
- D. The school provides learning opportunities in accessible, convenient settings that help parents grow as leaders and advocate for themselves and their families.
- E. School leaders, teachers and counselors engage parents in career exploration activities with their children.
- F. School leaders collect and use parent engagement data to improve relationships with families and develop programs and services that better meet their needs.

- 8. Systems of Support** — Ensure each student is prepared for educational success through access to high-quality academic and social-emotional counseling and support services. (**Systems of Support**)

**Indicators**

- A. Teachers employ a systematic approach to supporting students who are struggling academically.
- B. Teachers embed social-emotional development in their classroom instruction and seek out appropriate social-emotional services for students in need.
- C. School leaders provide teachers, counselors and other support staff with professional development and guidance on how to implement social-emotional supports and enrichment strategies in their instruction and engagement with students.

- D. School leaders are flexible in how they use time and create schedules to ensure students receive the assistance they need to develop literacy and math skills.
- E. Teachers design lessons and activities that help students develop the self-awareness, self-management and social skills they need to make good decisions and enjoy healthy relationships.
- F. School leaders and teachers implement targeted, research-based interventions that improve students' engagement, achievement and well-being.
- G. The school establishes and follows effective procedures to identify and support gifted students and students with developmental delays.

**9. Access and Equity** — Support each child and family in the school community with the curricular, instructional and social-emotional resources they need to thrive. (*Career Pathways*)

**Indicators**

- A. School leaders and teachers strive to know and understand the diverse cultural groups that comprise the school's community so they can respond appropriately and effectively to the needs of the students and families they serve.
- B. School leaders use all available resources to ensure that each student is supported.
- C. School leaders consider the needs of all students when determining placement decisions to ensure that each student has access to high-quality teachers.
- D. Teachers collect and analyze data to identify students who need targeted interventions and enrichments.
- E. Teachers continuously engage in progress monitoring to determine how well students are responding to targeted interventions.
- F. School and district leaders develop processes for communicating with schools, families and community partners and collaborating with these shareholders to foster effective, culturally responsive support for students and families.

**10. Leadership for Continuous Improvement** — Provide effective instructional leadership that establishes, cultivates and sustains the shared vision and mission of the school and engages the whole school community in using data to identify problems, develop and implement plans to solve these problems, and monitor progress as part of a continuous improvement process. (*Leadership for Continuous Improvement*)

**Indicators**

- A. School leaders engage the entire school community and all of its diverse shareholders in developing the school's vision and mission and engaging in strategic planning for continuous improvement.
- B. School leaders clearly and consistently create and support the time teachers need to collaborate to improve instructional practices and meet school goals.
- C. School leaders use instructional rounds, focused classroom observations and effective feedback to help teachers develop high-quality instruction, assignments and assessments that address schoolwide instructional priorities.
- D. School leaders engage parents and the community through meaningful events that showcase school programs, goals and actions that impact student engagement and achievement.
- E. School leaders ensure each student has access to robust teaching, challenging course work and a safe and nurturing school environment.
- F. School leaders employ a distributed leadership approach to engage teams of teachers, counselors and other staff in using SREB's [problem-solving process](#) — based on Deming's Plan-Do-Check-Act approach — to strategically plan for school improvement.